

A Little Patch of Shepherd's-Thyme



Prose Passages of
THOMAS HARDY

Arranged As Verse

By Jonathan Bracker

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The cottage in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, in which Thomas Hardy was born in 1840, and where he lived until he was 34. He wrote his early novels *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far From The Madding Crowd* here.

TO
STEVE SUSOYEV

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Editor's Note

Unlike most readers of Hardy, I came to know him first as poet rather than as novelist or short story writer. The text for a 1954 college reader, Louis Untermeyer's *Modern British Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, invited me into a new world. It not only began with selections by Hardy as the first important "modern" British poet, but in it Untermeyer stated that verse was "the form of expression with which he began and, as many (including the editor and Hardy himself) believe, the form by which he will be remembered longest."

I had not known that Hardy published seven collections of poetry during his lifetime — the first in 1898, when he was fifty-eight — plus a posthumous collection in 1928: I later learned that although various Collected Poems were published by Macmillan in 1919, 1923, 1928, and 1930, none of them included all of Hardy's 947 poems. These only became available in 1976 with James Gibson's edition of the *Complete Poems*, also published by Macmillan.

But when I read in Untermeyer's selection Hardy's "Snow In The Suburbs," "The Oxen," "The Roman Road" and "Afterwards" I was convinced: here were poems of a distinctly individual stamp. Though they employed rhyme and strict stanza patterns, their language was as alive as that of Donne or Shakespeare. Rhythms were never merely mechanical, but could seem odd until one understood that Hardy shared with Sir Francis Bacon the belief that "there is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion." The subjects were very touching, for their author responded strongly to human potential, the power of Nature in general, and the existence of animals, insects, and birds in particular. In many he strongly questioned whether Life has any discernible purpose (I can see why he was labeled a "pessimist," but there were also many poems which showed him to be a "meliorist," the term he much preferred).

In the years after college, during which my love for his poetry steadily grew and deepened, I did little to investigate Hardy as a writer of prose. Although aware he was universally admired for *The Return Of The Native*, *Tess Of The d'Urbervilles*, and *The Mayor Of Casterbridge*, I did not warm to him, because on attempting *The Return Of The Native* I was put off by the opening chapter — an extended description of the landscape of Egdon Heath — which struck me as turgid and oddly abstract, even a bit pretentious. I found words in it not unlike Hardy's diction in his poetry, but here they did not seem to work nearly so well. For such reasons, or excuses, I put the book aside. For almost forty years, I did not try again, though it certainly occurred to me that I—rather than Hardy's numerous admirers—might be mistaken.

Then, because of a friend's urging, I made another attempt. This time, I tried *Far From The Madding Crowd*. To my delight and relief, its opening paragraph consisted of one sentence only — a sentence I found immediately likable, charming, human:

When Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till they were within an unimportant distance of his ears, his eyes were reduced to chinks, and diverging wrinkles appeared round them, extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun.

Attention engaged, I began to immerse myself in the book, and a strange thing happened: I began to see poems, or what appeared to be very much like poems, throughout the prose. Perhaps because I already knew and loved Hardy's poetry, I was responsive to the possibility that such a thing could be. I would read a page or two and then come on a "set piece" like an oasis of beauty, emotion, or interest in what seemed by contrast to be basically efficient prose which moved plot and theme along. Soon I came to look for such passages, even to expect them.

After *Far From The Madding Crowd* I reattempted *The Return Of The Native*. By the second paragraph of chapter two I no longer held to my original assessment of the novel. Now Egdon Heath started to come alive, because of Hardy's use of homely detail — and because of other techniques he was using in this prose. The rhyme "white-quite" caught my mental ear; rereading it I heard near-rhyme in "heath-each" and saw how "Before him stretched the long, laborious road" could be termed iambic pentameter:

Before him stretched the long, laborious road, dry, empty and white. It was quite open to the heath on each side, and bisected that vast dark surface like the parting-line on a head of raven hair, diminishing and bending away on the furthest horizon.

The paragraph brought to mind Hardy's poem "The Roman Road", which begins:

The Roman Road runs straight and bare
As the pale parting-line in hair
Along the heath. And thoughtful men
Contrast its days of Now and Then,
And delve, and measure, and compare;

Visioning on the vacant air
Helmed legionaries, who proudly rear
The Eagle, as they pace again
The Roman Road.

Continuing in *The Return Of The Native*, I was to come across a particularly emotional and well-written extended description, in which Hardy conveyed the difficult and ultimately fatal journey of Mrs. Yeobright across the heath. In this, the image of a little patch of shepherd's-thyme declared itself to me as symbol of the oasis-like refreshment of Hardy's poetic prose passages. Almost inhaling its green fragrance, I determined to use the four iambic feet of "a little patch of shepherd's-thyme" as title for a collection I would make:

At length she reached a slope about two-thirds of the whole distance from Alderworth to her own home, where a little patch of shepherd's-thyme intruded upon the path; and she sat down upon the perfumed mat it formed there. In front of her a colony of ants had established a thoroughfare across the way, where toiled a never-ending and heavy-laden throng. To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower. She remembered that this bustle of ants had been in progress for years at the same spot — doubtless those of the old times were the ancestors of these which walked there now. She leant back to obtain more thorough rest, and the soft eastern portion of the sky was as great a relief to her eyes as the thyme was to her head.

I began to see what contributed to Hardy's poetic prose passages. Each tended to exhibit completeness. By that, I mean that often a single paragraph would be set aside for them, so that they were not buried in larger units, nor interrupted by less poetic sentences. Often they broke easily into equal units of two, three, or four lines, as though unconsciously Hardy had felt at the time in terms of stanzas instead of paragraphs. Often he used the poetic device of parallelism to create a repetition of rhythm.

Then I began to seek poetic prose passages in other novels by Hardy. They were always there. In some works there were fewer, but most existed in gratifyingly large numbers. Of his major novels, only in *Jude The Obscure* was there a falling off. Then I learned that Hardy had difficulty maintaining his own interest as he wrote that book — which, except for his preparation of *The Well-Beloved*, which had appeared in magazine form in 1892, was to be his last novel. After *Jude the Obscure*, he wrote nothing but poetry.

In college, I had read *A Stone, A Leaf, A Door: Poems By Thomas Wolfe, Selected And Arranged In Verse*, published by Scribner's in 1945. I found a library copy and reacquainted myself with what its editor, Sgt. John S. Barnes (whom I imagined in a fox-hole, cutting up paperback copies of novels and short stories by Wolfe) had done: Barnes had altered no word of the original, had added none, and supplied only simple titles. But he carefully arranged in stanza form what originally appeared as paragraphs, and it worked. I was pleased to see in the brief foreword by Louis Untermeyer, these words:

It may be objected that the editor tries to make Wolfe a poet by manipulation, by a mere typographical trick. But the rearrangement is neither arbitrary nor whimsical; it is implicit in Wolfe's language, logical in the rise and fall of the sentences, in the ebb and flow which reflect the tidal emotions.

Hardy's poetic prose sometimes appears in the dialogue, especially that of "rustics"; at such times we may feel we are in a midsummer-night's dream, the richness of diction and the presence of noticeable speech rhythm is so well-handled. But Hardy's poetic prose seldom employs rhyme; when he does so, the rhyming words are sufficiently far apart, and he uses near or inexact rhyme more often than exact rhyme. His rhythms are noticeable but not obtrusively: iambic, trochaic, or anapestic feet exist for a few syllables at a stretch, forming undercurrents rather than disturbing waves. Delighting in the use of figurative language, Hardy finds personification appealing, especially when forces of Nature are at play: his novels are often allied precisely to seasonal changes. But even in the early novels he tamed the device; it did not draw attention to itself. Metaphor, a device which can seem merely clever, is for the most part avoided, and on the rare occasion when Hardy uses a simile its freshness keeps it from being merely decorative. Sounds are enormously important to Hardy (sometimes they are the subject of the passage itself) but he creates echo-effects subtly. Alliteration is used seldom; Hardy is more likely to link words with the more subtle sounds of assonance and consonance. In short, Hardy is a master of poetic prose. It is not that all of his best prose is poetic, but that in his best prose we come across, just when they are needed, poetic passages that enliven and advance the story, help us see the characters as individuals — whether they are primary or secondary ones — and give to the setting its power.

Before leaving the subject of poetic prose, it is necessary to add one rather surprising fact. In the brief preface to his first collection of poetry, *Wessex Poems And Other Verses*, published in 1898 after all of his novels had appeared, Hardy says of the poems in it that "many were written long ago," and goes on to say that "In some few cases the verses were turned into prose and printed as such, it having been unanticipated at that time that they might see the light."

Without dated manuscripts, we cannot know how often and where this happened. But we do know that the largely self-educated Hardy began to think of himself at the age of twenty-three as a poet and that to achieve his goal he established an intense program of getting up early every morning to read English poetry as well as to write it, and that when the verses he sent to magazines were uniformly rejected, he kept them, "destroying those he thought irremediably bad — though he afterwards fancied he had destroyed too many,"

as Hardy said. So there was a body of poetic work from which to draw if he chose to alter and insert any into the novels he began writing at the age of twenty-seven.

For readers who may want actual poems by Hardy which have similarities to poetic prose selections of his, here is a guide with which to begin:

(poetic prose selection/ poem):

A Cheerful Half-Hour/ "Drummer Hodge"
A Road On Egdon Heath/ "The Roman Road"
Children In Church/ "Afternoon Service At Mellstock" and
"A Church Romance"
Germs And Particles/ "Proud Songsters"
How Her Request Was Granted/ "By Her Aunt's Grave" and
"The Lodging-House Fuschias"
Illegitimate Infant's Burial/ "The Dead Bastard"
June Storm/ "The Darkling Thrush"
Much To His Surprise He Takes A Delight In Companionship/
"Drummer Hodge"
Planting The Sighing Pines/ "The Pine Planters"
Temporary Despondency/ "Childhood Among The Ferns"
The Journeying Boy/ "Midnight On The Great Western" and
"The Boy's Dream"
The Milkmaid/ "Two Milkers"
Two Milkers/ "Tess's Lament"
William Dewy And The Bull/ "The Oxen"

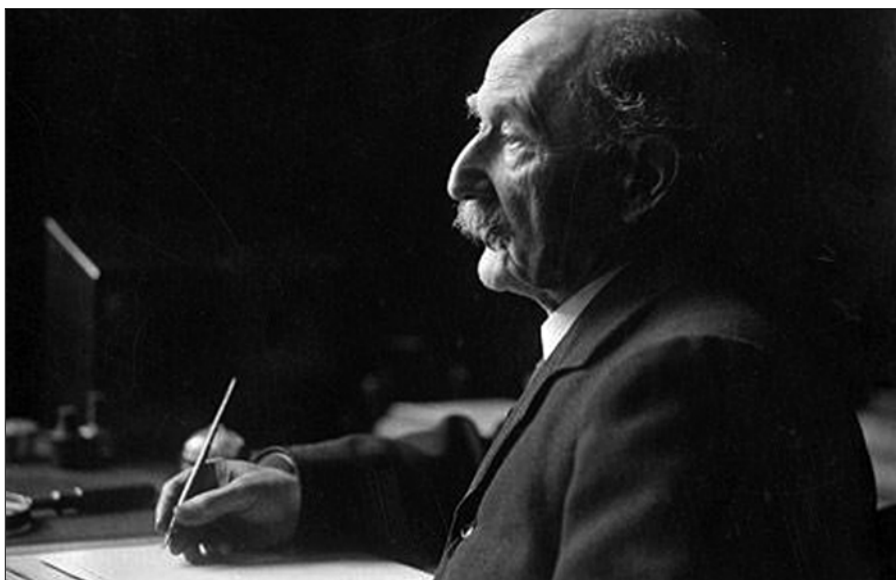
and this, from "A Few Crusted Characters: The History Of The Hardcomes":

Seaside Scene

When they reached Budmouth-Regis
they walked two and two along the shore --
their new boots going squeakity-squash
upon the clammy velvet sands.
I seem to see them now!

Then they looked at the ships in the harbour;
and then went up to the Lookout;
and then had dinner at an inn; and then again walked two and two,
squeakity-squash, upon the velvet sands.

With thanks to
ATLEE CUNNINGHAM



Thomas Hardy
Photo: Anglia Press Agency

1.

FROM
AN INDISCRETION
IN THE LIFE OF AN HEIRESS
(1868)

Children In Church

The congregation in Tollamore Church were singing the evening hymn,
The people gently swaying backwards and forwards like trees in a soft
breeze.

The heads of the village children, who sat in the gallery,
Were inclined to one side as they uttered their shrill notes,
Their eyes listlessly tracing some crack in the old walls, or following the
movement of a distant bough or bird, with features rapt almost
to painfulness.

Peasantry

Much as he loved her, his liking for the peasantry about him — his
mother's ancestry —
Caused him sometimes a twinge of self-reproach for thinking of her so
exclusively, and nearly forgetting his old acquaintances, neighbours,
and his grandfather's familiar friends, with their rough but honest ways.
To further complicate his feelings tonight there was the sight, on the one hand,
of the young lady with her warm rich dress and glowing future,
And on the other of the weak little boys and girls — some only five years old,
and none more than twelve, going off in their different directions in the
pelting rain,
Some for a walk of more than two miles, with the certainty of being drenched
to the skin,
And with no change of clothes when they reached their home.

He watched the rain spots thickening upon the faded frocks, worn-out
tippets, yellow straw hats and bonnets, and coarse pinafores
of his unprotected little flock as they walked down the path,
And was thereby reminded of the hopelessness of his attachment,
By perceiving how much more nearly akin was his lot to theirs than to hers.

By The Sea

The threatening rain passed off by the time that he reached the ridge
dividing the inland districts from the coast.
It began to get light, but his journey was still very lonely.
Ultimately the yellow shore-line of pebbles grew visible,
and the distant horizon of water,
spreading like a grey upland against the sky,
till he could soon hear the measured flounce of the waves.

2.

FROM
DESPERATE REMEDIES
(1871)

A Chair

Miss Aldclyffe had not chosen the easiest chair of her boudoir to sit in,
or even a chair of ordinary comfort;
but an uncomfortable, high, narrow-backed, oak-framed and seated chair,
which was allowed to remain in the room only on the ground of being
a companion in artistic quaintness to an old coffer beside it,
and was never used except to stand in to reach a book from
the highest row of shelves.

But she had sat erect in this chair for more than an hour,
for the reason that she was utterly unconscious of what her actions and
bodily feelings were.

The chair had stood nearest her path on entering the room, and she had gone to it in a
dream.

She sat in the attitude which denotes unflagging, intense, concentrated thought —
as if she were cast in bronze.

Her feet were together, her body bent a little forward, and quite unsupported by
the back of the chair; her hands on her knees,
her eyes fixed intently on the corner of a footstool.

On An Excursion Boat

Then the band of harps and violins struck up a lively melody,
and the deck was cleared for dancing;
the sun dipping beneath the horizon during the proceeding,
and the moon showing herself at their stern.

The sea was so calm, that the soft hiss produced by the bursting of the
innumerable bubbles of foam behind the paddles
could be distinctly heard.

The passengers who did not dance, including Cytherea and Springrove,
lapsed into silence, leaning against the paddle-boxes,
or standing aloof — noticing the trembling of the deck to the steps of the dance —
watching the waves from the paddles as they slid thinly and easily
under each other's bosom.

Night had quite closed in by the time they reached Creston harbour, sparkling
with its white, red, and green lights in opposition to the shimmering path of
the moon's reflection on the other side,
which reached away to the horizon till the flecked ripples reduced themselves to
sparkles as fine as gold dust.

To See With Children's Eyes

The day of their departure was one of the most glowing that the climax of a long series of summer heats could evolve.

The wide expanse of landscape quivered up and down like the flame of a taper, as they steamed along through the midst of it.

Placid flocks of sheep reclining under trees a little way off appeared of a pale blue colour.

Clover fields were livid with the brightness of the sun upon their deep red flowers.

All waggons and carts were moved to the shade by their careful owners; rain-water butts fell to pieces; well-buckets were lowered inside the covers of the well-hole, to preserve them from the fate of the butts, and generally, water seemed scarcer in the country than the beer and cider of the peasantry who toiled or idled there.

To see persons looking with children's eyes at any ordinary scenery, is a proof that they possess the charming faculty of drawing new sensations from an old experience — a healthy sign, rare in these feverish days — the mark of an imperishable brightness of nature.

Both brother and sister could do this; Cytherea more noticeably.

They watched the undulating corn-lands, monotonous to all their companions; the stony and clayey prospect succeeding those, with its angular and abrupt hills.

Boggy moors came next, now withered and dry — the spots upon which pools usually spread their waters showing themselves as circles of smooth bare soil, over-run by a net-work of innumerable little fissures.

Then arose plantations of firs, abruptly terminating beside meadows cleanly mown, in which high-hipped, rich-coloured cows, with backs horizontal and straight as the edge of a house, stood motionless or lazily fed.

Glimpses of the sea now interested them, which became more and more frequent till their train finally drew up beside the platform at Budmouth Regis.

Coming To Call?

The owner of the picturesque spot, after her survey from this point,
Went up to the walls and walked into the old court,
Where the paving-stones were pushed sideways and upwards
By the thrust of the grasses between them.

Two or three little children, with their fingers in their mouths,
Came out to look at her, and then ran in to tell their mothers
In loud tones of secrecy that Miss Aldclyffe was coming.
Miss Aldclyffe, however, did not come in.

Apple-gathering

It was about the middle of the early apple-harvest,
And the laden trees were shaken at intervals by the gatherers,

The soft pattering of the falling crop upon the grassy ground
Being diversified by the loud rattle of vagrant ones

Upon a rail, hencoop, basket, or lean-to roof,
Or upon the rounded and stooping backs of the collectors —

Mostly children, who would have cried bitterly at receiving such a smart blow
from any other quarter,
But smilingly assumed it to be but fun in apples.

An Altered Young Woman

“You see, it was several years ago they first walked together as young man and
young woman.

She’s altered too from what she was when he first courted her.”

“How, sir?”

“O, she’s more sensible by half.

When he used to write to her

she’d creep up the lane and look back over her shoulder,
and slide out the letter, and read a word and stand in thought
looking at the hills and seeing none.

Then the cuckoo would cry — away the letter would slip,

and she’d start wi’ fright at the mere bird, and have a red skin
before the quickest man among ye could say, ‘Blood rush up.’”

Young Idealist

He had a quality of thought which,

Exercised on homeliness, was humour;

On nature, picturesqueness;

On abstractions, poetry.

Being, as a rule, broadcast, it was all three.

Of the wickedness of the world he was too forgetful.

To discover evil in a new friend

Is to most people only an additional experience:

To him it was ever a surprise.

Approaching Storm

She followed the road into a bower of trees, overhanging it so densely
that the pass appeared like a rabbit's burrow, and presently reached
a side entrance to the park.

The clouds rose more rapidly than the farmer had anticipated:
the sheep moved in a trail, and complained incoherently.

Livid grey shades, like those of the modern French painters, made
a mystery of the remote and dark parts of the vista, and seemed to insist
upon a suspension of breath.

Before she was half-way across the park the thunder rumbled distinctly.

Men's Clothes And Women's Clothes

At this moment, by reason of the narrowness of the porch,
Their clothing touched, and remained in contact.

His clothes are something exterior to every man;
But to a woman her dress is part of her body.

Its motions are all present to her intelligence if not to her eyes;
No man knows how his coat-tails swing.

By the slightest hyperbole
It may be said that her dress has sensation.

Crease but the very Ultima Thule of fringe or flounce,
And it hurts her as much as pinching her.

Delicate antennae, or feelers,
Bristle on every outlying frill.

Go to the uppermost: she is there;
Tread on the lowest: the fair creature is there almost before you.

Two Children Of Poverty

Thither Edward went, followed by the man.

Four bell-pulls, one above the other like waistcoat-buttons, appeared on the door-post.

Edward seized the first he came to.

“Who did you want?” said a thin voice from somewhere.

Edward looked above and around him; nobody was visible.

“Who did you want?” said the thin voice again.

He found now that the sound proceeded from below the grating
covering the basement window.

He dropped his glance through the bars, and saw a child’s white face.

“Who did you want?” said the voice the third time, with precisely the same languid
inflection.

“Mrs. Higgins,” said Edward.

“Third bell up,” said the voice, and disappeared.

He pulled the third bell from the bottom, and was admitted by another child, the
daughter of the woman he was in search of.

He gave the little thing sixpence, and asked for her mamma.

The child led him up-stairs.

3.

FROM
UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE
(1872)

Winter Wood

To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree
Has its voice as well as its feature.

At the passing of the breeze
The fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock;
The holly whistles as it battles with itself;
The ash hisses amid its quiverings;
The beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall.

And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves,
Does not destroy its individuality.

On a cold and starry Christmas-eve within living memory a man was passing
up a lane towards Mellstock Cross in the darkness of a plantation
that whispered thus distinctively to his intelligence.

A Young Woman's Shoe

There, between the cider-mug and the candle, stood this interesting receptacle
of the little unknown's foot;
And a very pretty boot it was.

A character, in fact — the flexible bend at the instep,
The rounded localities of the small nestling toes,
Scratches from careless scampers now forgotten —
All, as repeated in the tell-tale leather,
Evidencing a nature and a bias.

Dick surveyed it with a delicate feeling that he had no right to do so
Without having first asked the owner of the foot's permission.

Young Man In Love

In the morning, do what he would — go upstairs, downstairs,
Out of doors, speak of the wind and weather,
Or what not — he could not refrain from an unceasing renewal,
In imagination, of that interesting enactment.

Tilted on the edge of one foot he stood beside the fireplace,
Watching his mother grilling rashers;
But there was nothing in grilling, he thought,
Unless the Vision grilled.

The limp rasher hung down
Between the bars of the gridiron
Like a cat in a child's arms;
But there was nothing in similes unless She uttered them.

He looked at the daylight shadows of a yellow hue,
Dancing with the firelight shadows in blue
On the whitewashed chimney corner,
But there was nothing in shadows.

“Perhaps the new young wom — sch — Miss Fancy Day
Will sing in church with us this morning,” he said.
The tranter looked a long time before he replied,
“I fancy she will; and yet I fancy she won’t.”

Our Heroine

She belonged to the taller division of middle height.

Flexibility was her first characteristic,
By which she appeared to enjoy the most easeful rest
When she was in gliding motion.
Her dark eyes — arched by brows of so keen, slender, and soft a curve,
That they resembled nothing so much as two slurs in music —
Showed primarily a bright sparkle each.

This was softened by a frequent thoughtfulness,
Yet not so frequent as to do away, for more than a few minutes at a time,
With a certain coquettishness;
Which in its turn
Was never so decided
As to banish honesty.

Her lips imitated her brows
In their clearly-cut outline and softness of bend;
And her nose was well shaped —
Which is saying a great deal,
When it is remembered that there are a hundred pretty mouths and eyes
For one pretty nose.

Add to this, plentiful knots of dark-brown hair,
A gauzy dress of white, with blue facings;
And the slightest idea may be gained of the young maiden
Who showed, amidst the rest of the dancing-ladies,
Like a flower
Among vegetables.

Dewy Morning

It was a morning of the latter summer-time;

A morning of lingering dews, when the grass is never dry in the shade.

Fuchsias and dahlias were laden till eleven o'clock with small drops and dashes
of water, changing the colour of their sparkle at every movement of the air;
and elsewhere hanging on twigs like small silver fruit.

The threads of garden spiders appeared thick and polished.

In the dry and sunny places, dozens of long-legged crane-flies whizzed off the
grass at every step the passer took.

Tempestuous Afternoon

A single vast grey cloud covered the country, from which the small rain and mist
had just begun to blow down in wavy sheets, alternately thick and thin.

The trees of the old brown plantations writhed like miserable men as the air
wended its way swiftly among them: the lowest portions of their trunks,
that had hardly ever been known to move, were visibly rocked by the
fiercer gusts, distressing the mind by its painful unwontedness, as when
a strong man is seen to shed tears.

Low-hanging boughs went up and down; high and erect boughs went to and fro;
the blasts being so irregular, and divided into so many cross-currents, that
neighbouring branches of the same tree swept the skies in independent
motions, crossed each other, passed, or became entangled.

Across the open spaces flew flocks of green and yellowish leaves which, after
travelling a long distance from their parent trees, reached the ground
and lay there with their under-sides upward.

Rural Dance

I.

Mr. Shiner, according to the interesting rule laid down, deserted his own partner, and made off down the middle with this fair one of Dick's — The pair appearing from the top of the room like two persons tripping down a lane to be married.

Dick trotted behind with what was intended to be a look of composure, but which was, in fact, a rather silly expression of feature — implying, with too much earnestness, that such an elopement could not be tolerated.

Then they turned and came back, when Dick grew more rigid around his mouth, and blushed with ingenuous ardour as he joined hands with his rival and formed the arch over his lady's head; which presumably gave the figure its name;

Relinquishing her again at setting to partners, when Mr. Shiner's new chain quivered in every link, and all the loose flesh upon the tranter — who here came into action again — shook like jelly.

II.

Mrs. Penny, being always rather concerned for her personal safety when she danced with the tranter,

Fixed her face to a chronic smile of timidity the whole time it lasted — a peculiarity which filled her features with wrinkles, and reduced her eyes to little straight lines like hyphens, as she jiggled up and down opposite him,

Repeating in her own person not only his proper movements, but also the minor flourishes which the richness of the tranter's imagination led him to introduce from time to time —

An imitation which had about it something of slavish obedience, not unmixed with fear.

III.

The ear-rings of the ladies now flung themselves wildly about, turning violent summersaults, banging this way and that, and then swinging quietly against the ears sustaining them.

IV.

Mrs. Crumpler — a heavy woman, who, for some reason which nobody ever thought worth inquiry, danced in a clean apron — moved so smoothly through the figure that her feet were never seen; conveying to imaginative minds the idea that she rolled on castors.

V.

Minute after minute glided by, and the party reached the period when ladies' back-hair begins to look forgotten and dissipated;
When a perceptible dampness makes itself apparent upon the faces even of delicate girls — a ghastly dew having for some time rained from the features of their masculine partners;
When skirts begin to be torn out of their gathers;
When elderly people, who have stood up to please their juniors, begin to feel sundry small tremblings in the region of the knees, and to wish the interminable dance was at Jericho;
When (at country parties of the thorough sort) waistcoats begin to be unbuttoned, and when the fiddlers' chairs have been wriggled, by the frantic bowing of their occupiers, to a distance of about two feet from where they originally stood.

A Happy Dinner

That elder portion of the company which loved eating and drinking
Put on a look to signify that till this moment
They had quite forgotten that it was customary to expect suppers on these occasions;
Going even further than this politeness of feature, and starting irrelevant subjects,
The exceeding flatness and forced tone of which rather betrayed their object.

The younger members said they were quite hungry,
And that supper would be delightful though it was so late.

Good luck attended Dick's love-passes during the meal.
He sat next Fancy, and had the thrilling pleasure of using permanently a glass
which had been taken by Fancy in mistake;
Of letting the outer edge of the sole of his boot touch the lower verge of her skirt;
And to add to these delights the cat, which had lain unobserved in her lap
for several minutes, crept across into his own, touching him with fur
that had touched her hand a moment before.

There were, besides, some little pleasures in the shape of helping her to
vegetable she didn't want, and when it had nearly alighted on her plate
taking it across for his own use, on the plea of waste not, want not.

He also, from time to time, sipped sweet sly glances at her profile; noticing the
set of her head, the curve of her throat, and other artistic properties of the lively
goddess,
Who the while kept up a rather free, not to say too free, conversation with
Mr. Shiner sitting opposite;
Which, after some uneasy criticism, and much shifting of argument backwards
and forwards in Dick's mind,
He decided not to consider of alarming significance.

Music And Eating

“Truly, now,” said Michael Mail, clearing the corner of his throat in the manner of a man who meant to be convincing;

“There’s a friendly tie of some sort between music and eating.”

He lifted the cup to his mouth, and drank himself gradually backwards from a perpendicular position to a slanting one,

During which time his looks performed a circuit from the wall opposite him to the ceiling overhead.

Then clearing the other corner of his throat: “Once I was a-setting in the little kitchen of the Three Choughs at Casterbridge,

Having a bit of dinner, and a brass band struck up in the street.

Such a beautiful band as that were!

I was sitting eating fried liver and lights, I well can mind —

Ah, I was! and to save my life, I couldn’t help chawing to the tune.

Band played six-eight time; six-eight chaws I, willy-nilly.

Band plays common; common time went my teeth among the fried liver and lights as true as a hair.

Beautiful ’twere! Ah, I shall never forget that there band!”

“That’s as musical a circumstance as ever I heard of,” said grandfather James, with the absent gaze which accompanies profound criticism.

“I don’t like Michael’s tuneful stories then,” said Mrs. Dewy. “They are quite coarse to a person of decent taste.”

Old Michael’s mouth twitched here and there, as if he wanted to smile but didn’t know where to begin,

Which gradually settled to an expression that it was not displeasing for a nice woman like the tranter’s wife to correct him.

“Well, now,” said Reuben, with decisive earnestness, “that coarseness that’s so upsetting to Ann’s feelings is to my mind a recommendation; for it do always prove a story to be true.

And for the same reason, I like a story with a bad moral.

My sonnies, all true stories have a coarseness or a bad moral, depend upon’t.

If the story-tellers could have got decency and good morals from true stories, who’d ha’ troubled to invent parables?”

Saying this the tranter arose to fetch a new stock of cider, mead, and home-made wines.

A Mood Of Blitheness

It was the week after the Easter holidays,
And he was journeying along
With Smart the mare and the light spring-cart,
Watching the damp slopes of the hill-sides

As they streamed in the warmth of the sun,
Which at this unsettled season shone on the grass
With the freshness of an occasional inspector
Rather than as an accustomed proprietor.

The Keeper's House

It was a satisfaction to walk into the keeper's house,
Even as a stranger, on a fine spring morning like the present.

A curl of wood-smoke came from the chimney and drooped over the roof
Like a blue feather in a lady's hat;

And the sun shone obliquely upon the patch of grass in front,
Which reflected its brightness through the open doorway and up the staircase
opposite,
Lighting up each riser with a shiny green radiance, and leaving the top of each
step in shade.

Husband, Wife, And Son At The End Of The Party

“Really,” said the tranter, in a tone of placid satisfaction, “I’ve had so little time to attend to myself all the evenen, that I mean to enjoy a quiet meal now!

A slice of this here ham — neither too fat nor too lean — so;

And then a drop of this vinegar and pickles — there, that’s it —

And I shall be as fresh as a lark again!

And to tell the truth, my sonny, my inside ’ve been as dry as a lime-basket all night.”

“I like a party very well,” said Mrs. Dewy, leaving off the adorned tones she had been bound to use throughout the evening and returning to the natural marriage voice:

“But, Lord, ’tis such a sight of heavy work next day! And what with the plates, and knives and forks,

And bits kicked off your furniture, and I don’t know what all, why, a body could a’most wish there were no such things as Christmases.

Ah-h dear!” she yawned, till the clock in the corner had ticked several beats.

She cast her eyes round upon the dust-laden furniture, and sank down overpowered at the sight.

“Well, I be getting all right by degrees, thank the Lord for’t!” said the tranter cheerfully through a mangled mass of ham and bread, without lifting his eyes from the plate, and chopping away with his knife and fork as if he were felling trees.

“Ann, you may as well go on to bed at once, and not bide there making such sleepy faces; you look as long-favoured as a fiddle, upon my life, Ann.

There, you must be wearied out, ’tis true.

I’ll do the doors and wind up the clock; and you go on, or you’ll be as white as a sheet to-morrow.”

“Ay; I don’t know whether I shan’t or no.”

The matron passed her hand across her eyes to brush away the film of sleep till she got upstairs.

Dick wondered how it was that when people were married they could be so blind to romance;

And was quite certain that if he ever took to wife that dear impossible Fancy, he and she would never be so dreadfully practical and undemonstrative of the Passion as his father and mother were.

The most extraordinary thing was, that all the fathers and mothers he knew were just as undemonstrative as his own.

4.

FROM
A PAIR OF BLUE EYES
(1873)

Her Eyes

One point in her, however,
You did notice:
That was her eyes.

In them was seen a sublimation of all of her;
It was not necessary to look further:
There she lived.

These eyes were blue;
Blue as autumn distance —
Blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of hills and woody
slopes on a sunny September morning.

A misty and shady blue,
That had no beginning or surface,
And was looked *into* rather than *at*.

Young Woman And Rabbit

Once he murmured the name of Elfride.

Ah, there she was! On the lawn in a plain dress, without hat or bonnet,
Running with a boy's velocity,
Superadded to a girl's lightness,
After a tame rabbit she was endeavouring to capture,
Her strategic intonations of coaxing words alternating with desperate rushes
So much out of keeping with them that the hollowness of such expressions
Was but too evident to her pet,
Who darted and dodged in carefully timed counterpart.

Churchyard

The churchyard was entered on this side by a stone stile, over which having
clambered, you remained still on the wild hill,
The within not being so divided from the without
As to obliterate the sense of open freedom.

A delightful place to be buried in — postulating that delight can accompany a
man to his tomb under any circumstances.

There was nothing horrible in this churchyard, in the shape of tight mounds
bonded with sticks, which shout imprisonment in the ears rather than
whisper rest;
Or trim garden-flowers, which only raise images of people in new black crape
and white handkerchiefs coming to tend them;
Or wheel-marks, which remind us of hearses and mourning coaches;
Or cypress bushes, which make a parade of sorrow;
Or coffin-boards and bones lying behind trees, showing that we are only
leaseholders of our graves.

No; nothing but long, wild, untutored grass,
Diversifying the forms of the mounds it covered —
Themselves irregularly shaped, with no eye to effect;
The impressive presence of the old mountain that all this was a part of
Being nowhere excluded by disguising art.

Outside were similar slopes and similar grass;
And then the serene impassive sea,
Visible to a width of half the horizon,
And meeting the eye with the effect of a vast concave, like the interior
of a blue vessel.

Detached rocks stood upright afar,
A collar of foam girding their bases, and repeating in its whiteness
The plumage of a countless multitude of gulls that restlessly hovered about.

Grey Weather

It was breakfast time.

As seen from the rectory dining-room,
Which took a warm tone of light from the fire,
The weather and scene outside seemed to have stereotyped themselves
In unrelieved shades of grey.

The long-armed trees and shrubs of juniper, cedar, and pine varieties, were
 greyish-black;
Those of the broad-leaved sort, together with the herbage, were greyish-green;
The eternal hills and tower behind them were greyish-brown;
The sky, dropping behind all, grey of the purest melancholy.

Yet in spite of this sombre artistic effect
The morning was not one which tended to lower the spirits.
It was even cheering. For it did not rain,
Nor was rain likely to fall for many days to come.

First Kiss

It was Elfride's first kiss.
And so awkward and unused was she; full of striving —
No relenting.

There was none of those apparent struggles to get out of the trap which only
 result in getting further in:
No final attitude of receptivity:
No easy close of shoulder to shoulder, hand upon hand, face upon face, and,
 in spite of coyness, the lips in the right place at the supreme moment.

That graceful though apparently accidental falling into position,
Which many have noticed as precipitating the end and making sweethearts
 the sweeter,
Was not here.

Why? Because experience was absent.
A woman must have had many kisses
Before she kisses well.

Stepmother

“Ah, darling!” she exclaimed good-humouredly,
“You didn’t think when you showed a strange old woman over the conservatory
a month or two ago,
And explained the flowers to her so prettily,
That she would so soon be here in new colours. Nor did she, I am sure.”

The new mother had been truthfully enough described by Mr. Swancourt.

She was not physically attractive.
She was dark — very dark — in complexion, portly in figure,
And with a plentiful residuum of hair in the proportion of half a dozen white
ones to half a dozen black ones, though the latter were black indeed.

No further observed, she was not a woman to like.

But there was more to see.

To the most superficial critic it was apparent
That she made no attempt to disguise her age.
She looked five-and-fifty at the first glance, and close acquaintanceship never
proved her older.

Another and still more winning trait was one attaching to the corners of her mouth.
Before she made a remark these often twitched gently: not backwards and
forwards, the index of nervousness; not down upon the jaw, the sign of
determination; but palpably upwards,
In precisely the curve adopted to represent mirth in the broad caricatures of
schoolboys.

Only this element in her face
Was expressive of anything within the woman, but it was unmistakable.
It expressed humour subjective as well as objective — which could survey
the peculiarities of self in as whimsical a light as those of other people.

In Hyde Park

Elfride could not but admire the beauty of her fellow countrywomen,
Especially since herself and her own few acquaintances
Had always been slightly sunburnt or marked on the back of the hands by a
 bramble-scratch at this time of the year.

“And what lovely flowers and leaves they wear in their bonnets!” she exclaimed.

“O yes,” returned Mrs. Swancourt.

“Some of them are even more striking in colour than any real ones.

Look at that beautiful rose worn by the lady inside the rails.

Elegant vine-tendrils introduced upon the stem as an improvement upon prickles,
 and all growing so naturally just over her ear —

I say *growing* advisedly, for the pink of the petals and the pink of her handsome
 cheeks

Are equally from Nature’s hand to the eyes of the most casual observer.”

“But praise them a little, they do deserve it!” said generous Elfride.

“Well, I do. See how the Duchess of _____ waves to and fro in her seat,
 utilizing the sway of her landau by looking around only when her head
 is swung forward, with a passive pride which forbids a resistance
 to the force of circumstance.

Look at the pretty pout on the mouths of that family there, retaining no traces
 of being arranged beforehand, so well is it done.

Look at the demure close of the little fists holding the parasols; the tiny alert
 thumb, sticking up erect against the ivory stem as knowing as can be,

The satin of the parasol invariably matching the complexion of the face beneath it,
 yet seemingly by an accident, which makes the thing so attractive.

There’s the red book lying on the opposite seat, bespeaking the vast numbers
 of their acquaintance.

And I particularly admire the aspect of that abundantly daughtered woman
on the other side —

I mean her look of unconsciousness that the girls are stared at by the walkers,
and above all the look of the girls themselves — losing their gaze
in the depths of handsome men's eyes without appearing to notice
whether they are observing masculine eyes or the leaves of the trees.
There's praise for you. But I am only jesting, child — you know that."

Waiting For A Sound

Stephen stood at the door of the porch and listened.

He could have heard the softest breathing of any person within the porch; nobody was there.

He went inside the doorway, sat down upon the stone bench, and waited with a beating heart.

The faint sounds heard only accentuated the silence.

The rising and falling of the sea, far away along the coast, was the most important.

A minor sound was the scurr of a distant night-hawk.

Among the minutest where all were minute were the light settlement of gossamer fragments floating in the air,

A toad humbly labouring along through the grass near the entrance,

The crackle of a dead leaf which a worm was endeavouring to pull into the earth, a waft of air, getting nearer and nearer, and expiring at his feet under the burden of a winged seed.

With all these soft sounds there came not the only soft sound he cared to hear — the footfall of Elfride.

Upon The Quay

And thus waiting for night's nearer approach, he watched the placid scene, over
which the pale luminosity of the west cast a sorrowful monochrome, that
became slowly embrowned by the dusk.

A star appeared, and another, and another.
They sparkled amid the yards and rigging of the two coal brigs lying alongside,
as if they had been tiny lamps suspended in the ropes.

The masts rocked sleepily to the infinitesimal flux of the tide,
Which clucked and gurgled with idle regularity in nooks and holes of the harbor wall.

5.

FROM
FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD
(1874)

On A Waggon

Casually glancing over the hedge, Oak saw coming down the incline before him
an ornamental spring waggon, painted yellow and gaily marked, drawn
by two horses, a waggoner walking alongside bearing a whip
perpendicularly.

The waggon was laden with household goods and window plants, and on the apex
of the whole sat a woman, young and attractive.

Gabriel had not beheld the sight for more than half a minute, when the vehicle
was brought to a standstill just beneath his eyes.

“The tailboard of the waggon is gone, Miss,” said the waggoner.

“Then I heard it fall,” said the girl, in a soft, though not particularly low voice.

“I heard a noise I could not account for when we were coming up the hill.”

“I’ll run back.” “Do,” she answered.

The sensible horses stood — perfectly still, and the waggoner’s steps sank fainter
and fainter in the distance.

The girl on the summit of the load sat motionless,

Surrounded by tables and chairs with their legs upwards, backed by an oak settle,
and ornamented in front by pots of geraniums, myrtles, and cactuses, together
with a caged canary —

All probably from the windows of the house just vacated.

There was also a cat in a willow basket, from the partly-opened lid of which

She gazed with half-closed eyes,

And affectionately surveyed the small birds around.

Sounds On A Winter Hill

The hill was covered on its northern side by an ancient and decaying plantation
of beeches,

Whose upper verge formed a line over the crest,
Fringing its arched curve against the sky, like a mane.

Tonight these trees sheltered the southern slope from the keenest blasts,
Which smote the wood and floundered through it with a sound as of grumbling,
Or gushed over its crowning boughs in a weakened moan.

The dry leaves in the ditch simmered and boiled in the same breezes,
A tongue of air occasionally ferreting out a few,
And sending them spinning across the grass.

A group or two of the latest in date amongst the dead multitude
Had remained till this very mid-winter time on the twigs which bore them,
And in falling rattled against the trunks with smart taps.

Between this half-wooded half-naked hill, and the vague still horizon
That its summit indistinctly commanded,
Was a mysterious sheet of fathomless shade —

The sounds from which suggested that what it concealed bore some reduced
resemblance to features here.

The thin grasses, more or less coating the hill, were touched by the wind in
breezes of differing powers, and almost of differing natures —
One rubbing the blades heavily, another raking them piercingly, another
brushing them like a soft broom.

The instinctive act of humankind was to stand and listen, and learn how the trees
on the right and the trees on the left wailed or chaunted to each other in the
regular antiphonies of a cathedral choir;

How hedges and other shapes to leeward then caught the note, lowering it to
the tenderest sob;

And how the hurrying gust then plunged into the south, to be heard no more.

Riding Along

To persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this, the roll
of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement.

The sensation may be caused by the panoramic glide of the stars past earthly
objects, which is perceptible in a few minutes of stillness, or by the better
outlook upon space that a hill affords, or by the wind, or by the solitude;
But whatever be its origin the impression of riding along is vivid and abiding.

The poetry of motion is a phrase much in use, and to enjoy the epic form of that
gratification

It is necessary to stand on a hill at a small hour of the night, and, having first
expanded with a sense of difference from the mass of civilised mankind,
who are dreamwapt and disregarding of all such proceedings at this time,
Long and quietly watch your stately progress through the stars.

After such a nocturnal reconnoitre it is hard to get back to earth,
And to believe that the consciousness of such majestic speeding
Is derived from a tiny human frame.

Two Cows And A Calf

The cow standing erect was of the Devon breed,
And was encased in a tight warm hide of rich Indian red,
As absolutely uniform from eyes to tail
As if the animal had been dipped in a dye of that colour,
Her long back being mathematically level.
The other was spotted, grey and white.

Beside her Oak now noticed a little calf about a day old,
Looking idiotically at the two women,
Which showed that it had not long been accustomed to the phenomenon of
 eyesight,
And often turning to the lantern,
Which it apparently mistook for the moon,
Inherited instinct having as yet had little time for correction by experience.

Bathsheba On Horseback

Gabriel was about to advance and restore the missing article,
When an unexpected performance induced him to suspend the action for the
present.

The path, after passing the cowshed, bisected the plantation.
It was not a bridle-path — merely a pedestrian's track,
And the boughs spread horizontally at a height not greater than seven feet above
the ground, which made it impossible to ride erect beneath them.

The girl, who wore no riding-habit, looked around for a moment, as if to assure
herself that all humanity was out of view,
Then dexterously dropped backwards flat upon the pony's back,
Her head over its tail, her feet against its shoulders, and her eyes to the sky.

The rapidity of her glide into this position was that of a kingfisher — its
noiselessness that of a hawk.
Gabriel's eyes had scarcely been able to follow her.
The tall lank pony seemed used to such doings, and ambled along unconcerned.

Thus she passed under the level boughs.

The performer seemed quite at home anywhere between a horse's head and its tail,
And the necessity for this abnormal attitude having ceased with the passage of the
plantation,
She began to adopt another, even more obviously convenient than the first.

She had no side-saddle, and it was very apparent that a firm seat upon the smooth
leather beneath her was unattainable sideways.
Springing to her accustomed perpendicular like a bowed sapling, and satisfying
herself that nobody was in sight,
She seated herself in the manner demanded by the saddle, though hardly expected
of the woman, and trotted off in the direction of Tewnell Mill.

A Woman's Blush

A perception caused him to withdraw his own eyes from hers
As suddenly as if he had been caught in a theft.

Recollection of the strange antics she had indulged in when passing through the trees
Was succeeded in the girl by a nettled palpitation, and that by a hot face.

It was a time to see a woman redden
Who was not given to reddening as a rule;

Not a point in the milkmaid but was of the deepest rose-colour.
From the Maiden's Blush, through all varieties of the Provence down to the
Crimson Tuscany.

The countenance of Oak's acquaintance quickly graduated;
Whereupon he, in considerateness, turned away his head.

Young Man's Toilet

He had made a toilet of a nicely-adjusted kind —
Of a nature between the carefully neat and the carelessly ornate —
Of a degree between fine-market day and wet-Sunday selection.

He thoroughly cleaned his silver watch-chain with whiting,
Put new lacing straps to his boots, looked to the brass eyelet-holes,
Went to the inmost heart of the plantation for a new walking-stick, and trimmed
it vigorously on his way back;

Took a new handkerchief from the bottom of his clothes-box,
Put on the light waistcoat patterned all over with sprigs of an elegant flower
uniting the beauties of both rose and lily without the defects of either,
And used all the hair-oil he possessed upon his usually dry, sandy and inextricably
curly hair, till he had deepened it to a splendidly novel colour, between that of
guano and Roman cement, making it stick to his head like mace round a
nutmeg, or wet seaweed round a boulder after the ebb.

Shape In A Snowfall

An indescribable succession of dull blows, perplexing in their regularity,
Sent their sound with difficulty through the fluffy atmosphere.
It was a neighbouring clock striking ten.

The bell was in the open air,
And being overlaid with several inches of muffling snow,
Had lost its voice for the time.

About this house the snow abated:
Ten flakes fell where twenty had fallen,
Then one had the room of ten. Not long after

A form moved by the brink of the river.
By its outline upon the colourless background a close observer might have seen
that it was small.
This was all that was positively discoverable, though it seemed human.

The shape went slowly along,
But without much exertion,
For the snow, though sudden, was not as yet more than two inches deep.

Farmers At The Corn Exchange

The low though extensive hall, supported by beams and pillars, and latterly dignified by the name of Corn Exchange, was thronged with hot men who talked among each other in twos and threes, the speaker of the minute looking sideways into his auditor's face and concentrating his argument by a contraction of one eyelid during delivery.

The greater number carried in their hands ground-ash saplings, using them partly as walking-sticks and partly for poking up pigs, sheep, neighbours with their backs turned, and restless things in general, which seemed to require such treatment in the course of their peregrinations.

During conversations each subjected his sapling to great varieties of usage — bending it round his back, forming an arch of it between his two hands, overweighting it on the ground till it reached nearly a semicircle;

Or perhaps it was hastily tucked under the arm whilst the sample-bag was pulled forth and a handful of corn poured into the palm, which, after criticism, was flung upon the floor, an issue of events perfectly well known to half-a-dozen acute town-bred fowls which had as usual crept into the building unobserved, and waited the fulfillment of their anticipations with a high-stretched neck and oblique eye.

Her Mouth And Eyes

Something in the exact arch of her upper unbroken row of teeth,
And in the keenly pointed corners of her red mouth
When, with parted lips, she somewhat defiantly turned up her face to argue
a point with a tall man,
Suggested that there was potentiality enough
In that lithe slip of humanity
For alarming exploits of sex,
And daring enough to carry them out.

But her eyes had a softness —
Invariably a softness —
Which, had they not been dark,
Would have seemed mistiness; as they were,
It lowered an expression that might have been piercing
To simple clearness.

Liddy

Liddy, like a little brook,
Though shallow, was always rippling;
Her presence had not so much weight as to task thought,
And yet enough to exercise it.

More About Liddy

Liddy assumed a smaller physiognomy,
And shut her lips decisively.

On Receiving A Valentine

Since the receipt of the missive in the morning,
Boldwood had felt the symmetry of his existence
To be slowly getting distorted
In the direction of an ideal passion.

The disturbance was as the first floating weed to Columbus —
The contemptibly little suggesting possibilities of the infinitely great.

Slow Sunrise

It was one of the usual slow sunrises of this time of the year,
And the sky, pure violet in the zenith, was leaden to the northwest and murky
to the east, where, over the snowy down or
ewe-lease on Weatherbury Upper Farm, and
apparently resting upon the ridge, the only half of the sun
yet visible burnt rayless, like a red and flameless fire
shining over a white hearthstone.

The whole effect resembled a sunset as childhood resembles age.

What He Saw, And What He Thought

He saw her black hair, her correct facial curves and profile,
And the roundness of her chin and throat.

He saw then the side of her eyelids, eyes, and lashes, and the shape of her ear.
Next he noticed her figure, her skirt, and the very soles of her shoes.

Boldwood thought her beautiful, but wondered whether he was right in his
thought, for it seemed impossible that this romance in the flesh, if so
sweet as he imagined, could have been going on long without creating
a commotion of delight among men,
and provoking more inquiry than Bathsheba had done,
even though that was not a little.

To the best of his judgment neither nature nor art could improve this perfect one of
an imperfect many.

His heart began to move within him.

Boldwood, it must be remembered, though forty years of age, had never before
inspected a woman with the very centre and force of his glance;
They had struck upon all his senses at wide angles.

Was she really beautiful?

He could not assure himself that his opinion was true even now.

He furtively said to a neighbour, "Is Miss Everdene considered handsome?"

"O yes; she was a good deal noticed the first time she came, if you remember.

A very handsome girl indeed."

A man is never more credulous than in receiving favourable opinions on the
beauty of a woman he is half, or quite, in love with;
A mere child's word on the point has the weight of an R.A.'s.

Boldwood was satisfied now.

In The Stables

His house stood recessed from the road, and the stables, which are to a farm what a fireplace is to a room, were behind, their lower portions being lost amid bushes of laurel.

Inside the blue door, open half-way down, were to be seen at this time the backs and tails of half-a-dozen warm and contented horses standing in their stalls; and as thus viewed, they presented alternations of roan and bay, in shapes like a Moorish arch, the tail being a streak down the midst of each.

Over these, and lost to the eye gazing in from the outer light, the mouths of the same animals could be heard busily sustaining the above-named warmth and plumpness by quantities of oats and hay.

The restless and shadowy figure of a colt wandered about a loose-box at the end, whilst the steady grind of all the eaters was occasionally diversified by the rattle of a rope or the stamp of a foot.

Sheep-Washing Pool

The sheep-washing pool was a perfectly circular basin of brickwork in the meadows, full of the clearest water.

To birds on the wing its glassy surface, reflecting the light sky, must have been visible for miles around as a glistening Cyclops' eye in a green face.

The grass about the margin at this season was a sight to remember long — in a minor sort of way.

Its activity in sucking the moisture from the rich damp sod was almost a process observable by the eye.

The outskirts of this level water-meadow were diversified by rounded and hollow pastures,

Where just now every flower that was not a buttercup was a daisy.

The river slid along noiselessly as a shade,

The swelling reeds and sedge forming a flexible palisade upon its moist brink.

To the north of the mead were trees, the leaves of which were new, soft, and moist, not yet having stiffened and darkened under summer sun and drought,

Their colour being yellow beside a green — green beside a yellow.

From the recesses of this knot of foliage

The loud notes of three cuckoos were resounding through the still air.

Sheep-Shearing Season

It was the first day of June, and the sheep-shearing season culminated,
The landscape, even to the leanest pasture, being all health and colour.

Every green was young, every pore was open,
And every stalk was swollen with racing currents of juice.

God was palpably present in the country,
And the devil had gone with the world to town.

Flossy catkins of the later kinds, fern-sprouts like bishops' croziers, the square-headed
moschatel, the odd cuckoo-pint, — like an apoplectic saint in a niche
of malachite, — snow-white ladies'-smocks, the toothwort, approximating
to human flesh, the enchanter's night-shade, and the black-petaled
doleful-bells, were among the quainter objects of the vegetable world
in and about Weatherbury at this teeming time;

And of the animal, the metamorphosed figures of Mr. Jan Coggan, the master-shearer;
the second and third shearers, who travelled in the exercise of
their calling, and do not require definition by name; Henry Fray the
fourth shearer, Susan Tall's husband the fifth, Joseph Poorgrass the sixth,
young Cain Ball as assistant-shearer, and Gabriel Oak as general supervisor.

None of these were clothed to any extent worth mentioning, each appearing to
have hit in the matter of raiment the decent mean between a high and low caste
Hindoo.

An angularity of lineament, and a fixity of facial machinery in general,
proclaimed that serious work was the order of the day.

Shorn Sheep

The clean, sleek creature arose from its fleece —
How perfectly like Aphrodite rising from the foam
Should have been seen to be realised —
Looking startled and shy at the loss of its garment,

Which lay on the floor in one soft cloud,
United throughout, the portion visible being the inner surface only,
Which, never before exposed, was white as snow,
And without flaw or blemish of the minutest kind.

Passionate Moment

No Christmas robin
Detained by a window-pane
Ever pulsed
As did Bathsheba now.

Waggon In An Autumn Fog

The afternoon drew on apace, and, looking to the right towards the sea as he walked beside the horse, Poorgrass saw strange clouds and scrolls of mist rolling over the long ridges which girt the landscape in that quarter.

They came in yet greater volumes, and indolently crept across the intervening valleys, and around the withered papery flags of the moor and river brinks.

Then their dank spongy forms closed in upon the sky.

It was a sudden overgrowth of atmospheric fungi which had their roots in the neighbouring sea,

And by the time that horse, man, and corpse entered Yalbury Great Wood, these silent workings of an invisible hand had reached them, and they were completely enveloped,

This being the first arrival of the autumn fogs, and the first fog of the series.

The air was as an eye suddenly struck blind.

The waggon and its load rolled no longer on the horizontal division between clearness and opacity, but were imbedded in an elastic body of a monotonous pallor throughout.

There was no perceptible motion in the air, not a visible drop of water fell upon a leaf of the beeches, birches, and firs composing the wood on either side.

The trees stood in an attitude of intentness, as if they waited longingly for a wind to come and rock them.

A startling quiet overhung all surrounding things — so completely, that the crunching of the waggon-wheels was as a great noise, and small rustles, which had never obtained a hearing except by night, were distinctly individualised.

What Poorgrass Heard In The Fog

Joseph Poorgrass looked round upon his sad burden as it loomed faintly through the flowering laurustinus, then at the unfathomable gloom amid the high trees on either hand, indistinct, shadowless, and spectre-like in their monochrome of grey.

He felt anything but cheerful, and wished he had the company even of a child or dog.

Stopping the horse he listened.

Not a footstep or wheel was audible anywhere around, and the dead silence was broken only by a heavy particle falling from a tree through the evergreens and alighting with a smart rap upon the coffin of poor Fanny.

The fog had by this time saturated the trees, and this was the first dropping of water from the overbrimming leaves.

The hollow echo of its fall reminded the waggoner painfully of the grim Leveller.

Then hard by came down another drop, then two or three.

Presently there was a continual tapping of these heavy drops upon the dead leaves, the road, and the travellers.

The nearer boughs were beaded with the mist to the greyness of aged men, and the rusty-red leaves of the beeches were hung with similar drops, like diamonds on auburn hair.

Drink

"I don't mind taking just the least thimbleful ye can dream of more with ye, sonnies.
But only a few minutes,
Because 'tis as 'tis."

"Of course, you'll have another drop.
A man's twice the man afterwards.
You feel so warm and glorious, and you whop and slap at your work without any trouble,
And everything goes on like sticks-a-breaking.
Too much liquor is bad,
And leads us to that horned man in the smoky house;
But after all, many people haven't the gift of enjoying a wet,
And since we be highly favoured with a power that way,
We should make the most o't."

"True," said Mark Clark. "'Tis a talent
The Lord has mercifully bestowed upon us,
And we ought not to neglect it.
But, what with the parsons and clerks and school-people and serious tea-parties,
The merry old ways of good life have gone to the dogs —
Upon my carcass, they have!"

"Well, really, I must be onward again now," said Joseph.

"Now, now, Joseph; nonsense!
The poor woman is dead, isn't she, and what's your hurry?"
"Well, I hope Providence won't be in a way with me for my doings,"
said Joseph, again sitting down.

"I've been troubled with weak moments lately, 'tis true.
I've been drinky once this month already,
And I did not go to church a-Sunday,
And I dropped a curse or two yesterday;
So I don't want to go too far for my safety.
Your next world is your next world,
And not to be squandered offhand."

6.

FROM
THE HAND OF ETHELBERTA
(1876)

Reply To A Surprising Tale

“Mercy,” said her mother-in-law,
Lifting her large eyelids,
Heavy as window-shutters,
And spreading out her fingers
Like the horns of a snail.

A Varied Countenance

He was a man whose countenance varied with his mood,
Though it kept somewhat in the rear of that mood.

He looked sad when he felt almost serene,
And only serene when he felt quite cheerful.

It is a habit people acquire
Who have had repressing experiences.

Return Of A Native

He had been expected,
And all were glad to see again the sojourner in foreign lands,
Even down to the lady-like tabby, who was all purr and warmth towards him
Except when she was all claws and coldness.

Rainy Day

It was one of those hostile days of the year

when chatterbox ladies remain miserably in their homes to save the carriage and harness,
when clerks' wives hate living in lodgings,
when vehicles and people appear in the street with duplicates of themselves underfoot,
when bricklayers, slaters, and other out-door journeymen sit in a shed and drink beer,

When ducks and drakes play with hilarious delight at their own family game, or
spread out one wing after another in the slower enjoyment of letting the
delicious moisture penetrate to their innermost down.

The smoke from the flues of Sandbourne had barely strength enough to emerge into
the drizzling rain, and hung down the sides of each chimney-pot like the streamer of
a becalmed ship; and a troop of rats might have rattled down
the pipes from roof to basement with less noise than did the water that day.

An Audience

The front part of the room
Was well filled,
Rows of listeners
Showing themselves
Like a drilled-in crop
Of which not a seed has failed.

They were listeners
Of the right sort,
A majority having noses
Of the prominent and dignified type,
Which when viewed in oblique perspective
Ranged as regularly as bow-windows at a watering-place.

A Fear

“O mother, don’t!” said Ethelberta tenderly,
But with her teeth on edge;

And Picotee curled up her toes,
Fearing that her mother was going to moralize.

Knollsea

By anyone sitting in the room that commanded this prospect
A white butterfly among the apple-trees
Might be mistaken for the sails of a yacht far away on the sea;

And in the evening when the light was dim,
What seemed like a fly crawling upon the window-pane
Would turn out to be a boat in the bay.

Joey In Love

“O Joey, a boy no bigger than you are!” said Picotee reprovingly.

Her personal interest in the passion, however, provoked her to inquire, in the next breath, “Who is it? Do tell, Joey.”

“No bigger than I! What hev bigness to do with it?

That’s just like your old-fashioned notions.

Bigness is no more wanted in courting nowadays than in soldiering or smoking or any other duty of man.

Husbands is rare; and a promising courter who means business will fetch his price in these times, big or small, I assure ’e.

I might have been engaged a dozen times over as far as the bigness goes.

You should see what a miserable little fellow my rival is afore you talk like that.

Now you know I’ve got a rival, perhaps you’ll own there must be something in it.”

“Yes, that seems like the real thing, But who is the young woman?”

“Well, I don’t mind telling you, Picotee. It is Mrs. Doncastle’s new maid.

I called to see father last night, and had supper there; and you should have seen how lovely she were — eating sparrowgrass sideways, as if she were born to it.

But, of course, there’s a rival — there always is — I might have known that, and I will crush him!”

“But Mrs. Doncastle’s new maid — if that was she I caught a glimpse of the other day — is ever so much older than you — a dozen years.”

“What’s that to a man in love?

Pooh — I wish you would leave me, Picotee;

I wants to be alone.”

In The Vicar's Study

But it happened that the vicar's wife was sitting in the front room, making a pillow-case for the children's bed out of an old surplice which had been excommunicated the previous Easter;

She heard the newcomer's voice through the partition, started, and went quickly to her husband, who was, where he ought to have been, in his study.

At her entry he looked up with an abstracted gaze, having been lost in meditation over a little schooner which he was attempting to rig for their youngest boy.

At a word from his wife on the suspected name of the visitor, he resumed his earlier occupation of inserting a few strong sentences, full of the observation of maturer life, between the lines of a sermon written during his first years of ordination, in order to make it available for the coming Sunday.

His wife then vanished with the little ship in her hand, and the visitor appeared.

Hawk Versus Duck

She was about to return before dusk came on, when she heard a commotion in the air immediately behind and above her head.

The saunterer looked up and saw a wild-duck flying along with the greatest violence, just in its rear being another large bird,

Which a countryman would have pronounced to be one of the biggest duck-hawks that he had ever beheld.

The hawk neared its intended victim, and the duck screamed and redoubled its efforts.

Ethelberta impulsively started off in a rapid run that would have made a little dog bark with delight and run after,

Her object being, if possible, to see the end of this desperate struggle for a life so small and unheard-of.

Her stateliness went away, and it could be forgiven for not remaining; for her feet suddenly became as quick as fingers, and she raced along over the uneven ground with such force of tread that, being a woman slightly heavier than gossamer,

Her patent heels punched little D's in the soil with unerring accuracy wherever it was bare, crippling the heather-twigs where it was not, and sucked the swampy places with a sound of quick kisses.

Her rate of advance was not to be compared with that of the two birds, though she went swiftly enough to keep them well in sight in such an open place as that around her,

Having at one point in the journey been so near that she could hear the whisk of the duck's feathers against the wind as it lifted and lowered its wings.

When the bird seemed to be but a few yards from its enemy she saw it strike downwards, and after a level flight of a quarter of a minute, vanish.

The hawk swooped after, and Ethelberta now perceived a whitely shining oval of still water, looking amid the swarthy level of the heath like a hole through to a nether sky.

Into this large pond, which the duck had been making towards from the beginning of its precipitate flight, it had dived out of sight.

The excited and breathless runner was in a few moments close enough to see the disappointed hawk hovering and floating in the air as if waiting for the reappearance of its prey, upon which grim pastime it was so intent that by creeping along softly she was enabled to get very near the edge of the pool and witness the conclusion of the episode.

Whenever the duck was under the necessity of showing its head to breathe, the other bird would dart towards it, invariably too late, however; for the diver was far too experienced in the rough humour of the buzzard family at this game to come up twice near the same spot, unaccountably emerging from opposite sides of the pool in succession, and bobbing again by the time its adversary reached each place; so that at length the hawk gave up the contest and flew away, a satanic moodiness being almost perceptible in the motion of its wings.

7.

FROM
THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE
(1878)

A Road On Egdon Heath

Along the road walked an old man.

He was white-headed as a mountain, bowed in the shoulders, and faded in general aspect.

He wore a glazed hat, an ancient boat-cloak, and shoes; his brass buttons bearing
an anchor upon their face.

In his hand was a silver-headed walking stick, which he used as a veritable third
leg, perseveringly dotting the ground with its point at every few inches' interval.

One would have said that he had been, in his day, a naval officer of
some sort or other.

Before him stretched the long, laborious road, dry, empty, and white.

It was quite open to the heath on each side, and bisected
that vast dark surface like the parting-line on a head of black hair,
diminishing and bending away on the furthest horizon.

Gay Weddings

“Ah, now, you’d hardly believe it, but I don’t care for gay weddings,” said

Timothy Fairway, his eyes again travelling round.

“I hardly blame Thomasin Yeobright and neighbour Wildeve for doing it quiet,
if I must own it.

A wedding at home means five and six-handed reels by the hour; and they
do a man’s legs no good when he’s over forty.”

“True. Once at the woman’s house you can hardly say nay to being one in a jig,
knowing all the time that you be expected to make yourself worth your
victuals.”

“You be bound to dance at Christmas because ’tis the time o’ year; you must
dance at weddings because ’tis the time o’ life.

At christenings folk will even smuggle in a reel or two, if ’tis no further on than
the first or second chiel.

And this is not naming the songs you’ve got to sing . . .

For my part I like a good hearty funeral as well as anything.

You’ve as splendid victuals and drinks as at other parties, and even better.

And it don’t wear your legs to stumps in talking over a poor fellow’s ways as it
do to stand up in hornpipes.”

“Nine folks out of ten would own ’twas going too far to dance then, I suppose?”
said Grandfer Cattle inquiringly.

“’Tis the only sort of party a staid man can feel safe at after the mug have been
round a few times.”

Sleeping Girl

A young girl lay thereon, covered with a cloak.
She was asleep, and the light of the lantern fell upon her features.

A fair, sweet, and honest country face was revealed, reposing in a nest of wavy
chestnut hair.

It was between pretty and beautiful.

Though her eyes were closed, one could easily imagine
The light necessarily shining in them as the culmination of the luminous
workmanship around.

The groundwork of the face was hopefulness;
But over it now lay like a foreign substance a film of anxiety and grief.

The grief had been there so shortly as to have abstracted nothing of the bloom,
And had as yet but given a dignity to what it might eventually undermine.

The scarlet of her lips had not had time to abate, and just now it appeared still
more intense by the absence of the neighbouring and more transient colour
of her cheek.

The lips frequently parted, with a murmur of words.

She seemed to belong rightly to a madrigal —
To require viewing through rhyme and harmony.

One thing at least was obvious:
She was not made to be looked at thus.

Wildeve

He was quite a young man, and of the two properties, form and motion,
The latter first attracted the eye in him.

The grace of his movement was singular:

It was the pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career.

Next came into notice the more material qualities, among which was a profuse
crop of hair impeding over the top of his face, lending to his forehead
the high-cornered outline of an early Gothic shield;
And a neck which was smooth and round as a cylinder.

The lower half of his figure was of light build.

Altogether he was one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire,
and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike.

A Woman's Hair

She was in person full-limbed and somewhat heavy; without ruddiness, as without pallor;
And soft to the touch as a cloud.

To see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough
to form its shadow:

It closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow.

Her nerves extended into those tresses,
And her temper could always be softened by stroking them down.

When her hair was brushed
She would instantly sink into stillness and look like the Sphinx.

If, in passing under one of the Egdon banks,
Any of the thick skeins were caught, as they sometimes were, by a prickly tuft of
the large *Ulex Europoeus* —

Which will act as a sort of hairbrush —
She would go back a few steps, and pass against it a second time.

Her Mouth

The mouth seemed formed less to speak than to quiver,
Less to quiver than to kiss.
Some might have added, less to kiss than to curl.

Viewed sideways, the closing-line of her lips formed,
With almost geometric precision,
The curve so well known in the arts of design as the cima-recta, or ogee.

The sight of such a flexible bend as that on grim Egdon was quite an apparition.
It was felt at once that the mouth did not come over from Sleswig with a band of
Saxon pirates whose lips met like the two halves of a muffin.
One had fancied that such lip-curves were mostly lurking underground in the
south as fragments of forgotten marbles.

So fine were the lines of her lips that, though full,
Each corner of her mouth was as clearly cut as the point of a spear.
This keenness of corner was only blunted

When she was given over to sudden fits of gloom,
One of the phases of the night-side of sentiment
Which she knew too well for her years.

A Woman's Laugh

"Ay, my life!" said Eustacia, with a laugh
Which unclosed her lips
So that the sun shone into her mouth
As into a tulip, and lent it
A similar scarlet fire.

Budmouth

"And in my travels I go near Budmouth.
Now Budmouth is a wonderful place — wonderful —
A great salt sheening sea bending into the land like a bow —

Thousands of gentlepeople walking up and down —
Bands of music playing —
Officers by sea and officers by land walking among the rest —

Out of every ten folk
You meet
Nine of 'em in love."

An Old Soldier Remembers

“Really, there would have been nobody here who could have stood as decent
second to him, or even third,

If I hadn’t been a soldier in the Bang-up Locals (as we were called for our
smartness),” said Grandfer Cattle.

“And even as ’tis we all look a little scammish beside him.

But in the year four

’Twas said there wasn’t a finer figure in the whole South Wessex than I,
As I looked when dashing past the shop-winders with the rest of our company
on the day we ran out o’ Budmouth

Because it was thoughted that Boney had landed round the point.

There was I, straight as a young poplar,

Wi’ my firelock, and my bagnet,

And my spatterdashes, and my stock sawing my jaws off,

And my accoutrements sheening like the seven stars!

Yes, neighbours, I was a pretty sight in my soldiering days.

You ought to have seen me in four!”

Silently Watching

The month of March arrived, and the heath showed its first faint signs of
awakening from winter trance.

The awakening was almost feline in its stealthiness.

The pool outside the bank by Eustacia's dwelling, which seemed as dead and
desolate as ever to an observer who moved and made noises in his
observation,

Would gradually disclose a great animation when silently watched awhile.

A timid animal world had come to life for the season.

Little tadpoles and efts began to bubble up through the water, and to race along
beneath it;

Toads made noises like very young ducks, and advanced to the margin in twos
and threes;

Overhead, bumble-bees flew hither and thither in the thickening light, their drone
coming and going like the sound of a gong.

June Storm

The yellow and vapoury sunset which had wrapped up Eustacia from his parting gaze had presaged change.

It was one of those not infrequent days of an English June which are as wet and boisterous as November.

The cold clouds hastened on in a body, as if painted on a moving slide.
Vapours from other continents arrived upon the wind, which curled and parted round him as he walked on.

At length Clym reached the margin of a fir and beech plantation that had been enclosed from heath-land in the year of his birth.
Here the trees, laden heavily with their new and humid leaves,
Were now suffering more damage than during the highest winds of winter,
when the boughs are specially disencumbered to do battle with the storm.

The wet young beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, cripplings, and harsh lacerations,
From which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come,
And which would leave scars visible till the day of their burning.

Each stem was wrenched at the root,
Where it moved like a bone in its socket,
And at every onset of the gale convulsive sounds came from the branches, as if pain were felt.

In a neighbouring brake a finch was trying to sing;
But the wind blew under his feathers till they stood on end,
Twisted round his little tail, and made him give up his song.

Yet a few yards to Yeobright's left, on the open heath,
how ineffectively gnashed the storm!
Those gusts which tore the trees merely waved the furze and heather in a light caress.
Egdon was made for such times as these.

Young Wife

The oblique band of sunlight which followed her through the door became the
young wife well.

It illuminated her as her presence illuminated the heath.

In her movements, in her gaze, she reminded the beholder of the feathered
creatures who lived around her home.

All similes and allegories concerning her began and ended with birds.

There was as much variety in her motions as in their flight.

When she was musing she was a kestrel, which hangs in the air by an invisible
motion of its wings.

When she was in a high wind her light body was blown against trees and banks
like a heron's.

When she was frightened she darted noiselessly like a kingfisher.

When she was serene she skimmed like a swallow, and that is how she was
moving now.

A Furze-Cutter's Day

His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person.

His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band.

Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod.

The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down.

Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskillful acrobats, as chance might rule; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue.

Huge flies, ignorant of larders and wire-netting, and quite in savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man.

In and out of the fern-dells snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest.

Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen.

None of them feared him.

Nine Trees

The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude, and wild,
And for a few minutes Mrs. Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-
broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs.

Not a bough in the nine trees which composed the group
But was splintered, lopped, and distorted by the fierce weather that there held
them at its mercy whenever it prevailed.

Some were blasted and split as if by lightning, black stains as from fire marking
their sides,
While the ground at their feet was strewn with dead fir-needles and heaps of
cones blown down in the gales of past years.

The place was called the Devil's Bellows, and it was only necessary to come there
on a March or November night to discover the forcible reasons for that
name.

On the present heated afternoon, when no perceptible wind was blowing, the trees
kept up a perpetual moan which one could hardly believe to be caused by
the air.

Hot Garden On An August Afternoon

There lay the cat asleep on the bare gravel of the path,
As if beds, rugs, and carpets were unendurable.

The leaves of the hollyhocks hung like half-closed umbrellas,
The sap almost simmered in the stems, and foliage with a smooth surface glared
like metallic mirrors.

A small apple tree, of the sort called Ratheripe, grew just inside the gate,
The only one which throve in the garden, by reason of the lightness of the soil;

And among the fallen apples on the ground beneath were wasps rolling drunk
with the juice,
Or creeping about the little caves in each fruit which they had eaten out before
stupefied by its sweetness.

By the door lay Clym's furze-hook and the last handful of faggot-bonds she
had seen him gather;
They had plainly been thrown down there as he entered the house.

A Little Patch Of Shepherd's-Thyme

In two hours she reached a slope about three-fourths the whole distance from
Alderworth to her own home,
Where a little patch of shepherd's-thyme intruded upon the path;
And she sat down upon the perfumed mat it formed there.

In front of her a colony of ants had established a thoroughfare across the way,
Where they toiled a never-ending and heavy-laden throng.
To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower.
She remembered that this bustle of ants had been in progress for years at the
same spot — doubtless those of the old times were the ancestors of these
which walked there now.

She leant back to obtain more thorough rest,
And the soft eastern portion of the sky was as great a relief to her eyes as the
thyme was to her head.

While she looked a heron arose on that side of the sky and flew on with his face
towards the sun.
He had come dripping wet from some pool in the valleys,
And as he flew the edges and linings of his wings, his thighs, and his breast were
so caught by the bright sunbeams that he appeared as if formed of
burnished silver.

Up in the zenith where he was seemed a free and happy place,
Away from all contact with the earthly ball to which she was pinioned;
And she wished that she could arise uncrushed from its surface and fly as he
flew then.

Stormy Night

To Clym's regret it began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced.

The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house,
And filliped the eavesdroppings like peas against the panes.

He walked restlessly about the untenanted rooms, stopping strange noises in
windows and doors by jamming splinters of wood into the casements
and crevices,
And pressing together the lead-work of the quarries where it had become
loosened from the glass.

It was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen,
When ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor-houses are renewed and
enlarged from the size of a man's hand to an area of many feet.

The little gate in the palings before his dwelling continually opened and clicked
together again,
But when he looked out eagerly nobody was there;

It was as if invisible shapes of the dead
Were passing in on their way to visit him.

A Bundle

Thomasin carried in her arms a large bundle;
And having by this time seated herself she began to unroll it,

When a baby appeared as the kernel to the husks —
Dry, warm, and unconscious of travel or rough weather.

On The Generosity Of Human Beings

He did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortune,
So far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma,
And that instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory
They should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame.

But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled
In having such irons thrust into their souls
He did not maintain long. It is usually so,
Except with the sternest of men.

Human beings, in their generous endeavor to construct a hypothesis that
shall not degrade a First Cause,
Have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral
quality than their own;
And, even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon,
Invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears.

8.

FROM
THE TRUMPET-MAJOR
(1880)

A Heroine

Anne was fair, very fair,
In a poetical sense;
But in complexion she was of that particular tint
Between blonde and brunette
Which is inconveniently left without a name.

Her eyes were honest and inquiring, her mouth cleanly cut and yet not classical,
the middle point of her upper lip scarcely descending
so far as it should have done by rights,
so that at the merest pleasant thought, not to mention a smile,
portions of two or three white teeth were uncovered whether she would or not.

Some people said that this was very attractive.

She was graceful and slender, and, though but little above five feet in height,
could draw herself up to look tall.

In her manner, in her comings and goings, in her “I’ll do this,” or “I’ll do that,”
She combined dignity with sweetness as no other girl could do;
and any impressionable stranger youths who passed by
were led to yearn for a windfall speech from her,
and to see at the same time that they would not get it.

In short, beneath all that was charming and simple in this young woman
there lurked a real firmness, unperceived at first,
as the speck of colour lurks unperceived in the heart of the palest parsley flower.

More About Anne

She wore a white handkerchief to cover her white neck,
And a cap on her head with a pink ribbon round it, tied in a bow at the front.
She had a great variety of these cap-ribbons,
The young men being fond of sending them to her as presents until they
 fell definitely in love with a special sweetheart elsewhere, when
 they left off doing so.

Between the border of her cap and her forehead were ranged a row of round
 brown curls,
Like swallows' nests under eaves.

Noon

The heaviness of noon
Pervaded the scene,

And under its influence the sheep
Had ceased to feed.

Nobody was standing at the Cross,
The few inhabitants being indoors at their dinner.

No human being was on the down,
And no human eye or interest but Anne's seemed to be concerned with it.

The bees still worked on,
And the butterflies did not rest from roving,

Their smallness seeming to shield them from the stagnating effect that this
turning moment of day had on larger creatures.
Otherwise all was still.

A Cheerful Half-Hour

Before the last troops of dragoons rode off
They were welcomed in a body by Miller Lovejoy,
Who still stood in his outer garden,
This being a plot lying below the mill-tail, and stretching to the water-side.

It was just the time of year when cherries are ripe, and hang in clusters under
their dark leaves.

While the troopers loitered on their horses, and chatted to the miller across the stream,
He gathered bunches of the fruit, and held them up over the garden hedge
For the acceptance of anybody who would have them;
Whereupon the soldiers rode into the water where
it had washed holes in the garden bank,
and, reining their horses there, caught the cherries in their forage-caps,
or received bunches of them on the ends of their switches, with
the dignified laugh that became martial men when stooping
to slightly boyish amusement.

It was a cheerful, careless, unpremeditated half-hour,
Which returned like the scent of a flower
To the memories of some of those who enjoyed it,
Even at a distance of many years after,
When they lay wounded and weak in foreign lands.

Amusement

Anne became a little more dignified, and her look showed reserve.

But the yeoman on perceiving this
Went on talking to her in so civil a way
That he irresistibly amused her,
Though she tried to conceal all feeling.

At a brighter remark of his than usual
Her mouth moved, her upper lip playing uncertainly over her white teeth;
It would stay still -- no, it would withdraw a little way in a smile;
Then it would flutter down again;
And so it wavered like a butterfly
In a tender desire to be pleased and smiling,
And yet to be also sedate and composed;
To show him that she did not want compliments,
And yet that she was not so cold
As to wish to repress any genuine feeling
He might be anxious to utter.

Impromptu Meal

In a short time a fire blazed up the chimney,
A tablecloth was found, the plates were clapped down,
And a search made for what provisions the house afforded,
Which, in addition to various meats,
Included some fresh eggs of the elongated shape
That produces cockerels when hatched,
And had been set aside on that account
For putting under the next broody hen.

A more reckless cracking of eggs than that which now went on
Had never been known in Overcombe since the last large christening;
And as Loveday gashed one on the side, another at the end,
Another longways, and another diagonally, he acquired adroitness by practice,
And at last made every son of a hen of them fall into two hemispheres
As neatly as if opened by a hinge.

From eggs he proceeded to ham, and from ham to kidneys,
The result being a brilliant fry.

Not to be tempted to fall to before his father came back,
The returned navigator emptied the whole into a dish,
Laid a plate over the top, his coat over the plate, and his hat over the coat.

Thus completely stopping in the appetizing smell, he sat down to await events.

The Greeting

Then there was a welcoming of Captain Bob
By pulling out his arms like drawers
And shutting them again,
Smacking him on the back
As if he were choking,
Holding him at arm's length
As if he were of too large type to read close.

All which persecution
Bob bore with a wide, genial smile
That was shaken into fragments
And scattered promiscuously among the spectators.

Casterbridge Beer

This renowned drink — now almost as much a thing of the past as Falstaff's
favourite beverage —
Was not only well calculated to win the hearts of soldiers blown dry and
dusty by residence in tents on a hill-top,
But of any wayfarer whatever in that land.

It was of the most beautiful colour that the eye of an artist in beer could desire;
Full in body, yet brisk as a volcano; piquant, yet without a twang;
Luminous as an autumn sunset; free from streakiness of taste;
But, finally, rather heady.

The masses worshipped it,
The minor gentry loved it more than wine,
And by the most illustrious county families it was not despised.

Anybody brought up for being drunk and disorderly in the streets of its
natal borough,
Had only to prove that he was a stranger to the place and its liquor
To be honorably dismissed by the magistrates,
As one overtaken in a fault than no man could guard against
Who entered the town unawares.

Relief At Hand

The afternoon sermons at this church
Being of a dry and metaphysical nature at that date,
It was by a special providence
That the waggon-office was placed near the ancient fabric,
So that whenever the Sunday waggon was late,
Which it always was in hot weather,
In cold weather, in wet weather,
And in weather of almost every other sort,
The rattle, dismounting, and swearing outside
Completely drowned out the parson's voice within,
And sustained the flagging interest of the congregation at precisely the
right moment.

No sooner did the charity children begin to writhe on their benches, and
adult snores grow audible, than the waggon arrived.

9.

FROM
A LAODICEAN
(1881)

Walking Birds

It was that particular half-hour of the day in which the birds of the forest
Prefer walking to flying, and there being no wind,
The hopping of the smallest songster over the dead leaves
Reached his ear from behind the undergrowth.

Storks in Strassburg

After watching this upper storey of the city for some time in silence,
she asked Charlotte to hand her a binocular lying on the table, through
which instrument she quietly regarded the distant roofs.

“What strange and philosophical creatures storks are,” she said.
“They give a taciturn, ghostly character to the whole town.”

The birds were crossing and recrossing the field of the glass in their flight
hither and thither between the Strassburg chimneys,
Their sad grey forms sharply outlined against the sky, and their skinny legs
showing beneath like the limbs of dead martyrs in Crivelli’s
emaciated imaginings.

The indifference of these birds to all that was going on beneath them
impressed her:
To harmonize with their solemn and silent movements the houses beneath
should have been deserted, and grass growing in the streets.

Gymnastics

What was the captain seeing? A sort of optical poem.

Paula, in a pink flannel costume, was bending, wheeling, and undulating in
the air like a gold-fish in its globe, sometimes ascending by her arms
nearly to the lantern, then lowering herself till she swung level with
the floor.

Her aunt Mrs. Goodman, and Charlotte de Stancy, were sitting on campstools
at one end, watching her gyrations, Paula occasionally
addressing them with such an expression as —

“Now, Aunt, look at me — and you, Charlotte, is not that shocking to your
weak nerves,”

When some adroit feat would be repeated,

Which, however, seemed to give much more pleasure to Paula herself in
performing it than to Mrs. Goodman in looking on,

The latter sometimes saying, “O, it is terrific — do not run such a risk again!”

It would have demanded the poetic passion of some joyous Elizabethan lyrist
like Lodge, Nashe, or Greene, to fitly phrase Paula’s presentation
of herself at this moment of absolute abandonment to every muscular
whim that could take possession of such a supple form.

The white manila ropes clung about the performer like snakes as she took
her exercise, and the colour in her face deepened as she went on.

Captain de Stancy felt that, much as he had seen in early life of beauty in woman,
he had never seen beauty of such a real and living sort as this.

A recollection of his vow, together with a sense that to gaze on the festival of
this Bona Dea was, though so innocent and pretty a sight,
hardly fair or gentlemanly,

Would have compelled him to withdraw his eyes, had not the sportive
fascination of her appearance glued them there in spite of all.

And as if to complete the picture of Grace personified and add the one thing wanting to the charm which bound him, the clouds, till that time thick in the sky, broke away from the upper heaven, and allowed the noonday sun to pour down through the lantern upon her, irradiating her with a warm light that was incarnadined by her pink doublet and hose, and reflected in upon her face.

She only required a cloud to rest on instead of the green silk net which actually supported her reclining figure for the moment, to be quite Olympian; save indeed that in place of haughty effrontery there sat on her countenance only the healthy sprightliness of an English girl.

An Arriving Host

The X and Y Batteries of the Z Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery, were entering
Toneborough, each headed by the major with his bugler behind him.

In a moment they came abreast and passed, every man in his place;
that is to say:

Six shining horses, in pairs, harnessed by rope-traces white as milk, with a
driver on each near horse:

Two gunners on the lead-coloured stout-wheeled limber, their carcasses
jolted to a jelly for lack of springs:

Two gunners on the lead-coloured stout-wheeled gun-carriage, in the same
personal condition:

The nine-pounder gun, dipping its heavy head to earth, as if ashamed of
its office in these enlightened times:

The complement of jingling and prancing troopers, riding at the wheels
and elsewhere:

Six shining horses with their drivers, and traces white as milk, as before:

Two more gallant jolted men, on another jolting limber, and more stout
wheels and lead-coloured paint:

Two more jolted men on another drooping gun:

More jingling troopers on horse-back:

Again six shining draught-horses' traces, drivers, gun, gunners, lead paint,
stout wheels and troopers as before.

So each detachment lumbered slowly by, all eyes martially forward, except
when wandering in quest of female beauty.

Street In Lisieux

She was transported to the Middle Ages.

It contained the shops of tinkers, braziers, bellows-menders, hollow-turners,
and other quaintest trades, their fronts open to the street
beneath stories of timber overhanging so far on each side that a slit of sky
was left at the top for the light to descend, and no more.
A blue misty obscurity pervaded the atmosphere, into which the sun thrust
oblique staves of light.

It was a street for a mediaevalist to revel in,
Toss up his hat and shout hurrah in,
Send for his luggage, come and live in,
Die and be buried in.
She had never supposed such a street to exist outside the imaginations of
antiquarians.

Smells direct from the sixteenth century hung in the air in all their original
integrity and without a modern taint.

The faces of the people in the doorways seemed those of individuals who
habitually gazed on the great Francis, and spoke of Henry the Eighth as
the king across the sea.

10.

FROM
TWO ON A TOWER
(1882)

The Parson Who Married Beneath Him

“His father, the reverent Pa’son St. Cleeve, made a terrible bruckle hit in
’s marrying, in the sight of the high.
He were the curate here, my lady, for a length o’ time.”

“Oh, curate,” said Lady Constantine. “It was before I knew the village.”

“Ay, long and merry ago!

And he married Father Martin’s daughter — Giles Martin, a limberish man,
who used to go rather bad upon his lags, if you can mind.

I knowed the man well enough — who should know en
better!

The maid was a poor windling thing, and, though a playward piece o’ flesh
when he married her, ’a socked and sighed, and went out like
a snoff! Yes, my lady.

Well, when Pa’son St. Cleeve married this homespun woman the toppermost
folk wouldn’t speak to his wife.

Then he dropped a cuss or two, and said he’d no longer get his living by curing
their twopenny souls o’ such damn nonsense as that (excusing my common way),
and he took to farming straightway,

And then ’a dropped down dead in a nor’west thunder-storm;
it being said — hee-hee! — that Master God was in tantrums wi’en for
leaving his service — hee-hee!

I give the story as I heard it, my lady,
but be dazed if I believe in such trumpery about folks in the sky, nor anything else
that’s said on ’en, good or bad.”

Granny

Inside the house his maternal grandmother was sitting by a wood fire.
Before it stood a pipkin, in which something was evidently kept warm.
An eight-legged oak table in the middle of the room was laid for a meal.

This woman of eighty, in a large mob cap, under which she wore a little cap
to keep the other clean, retained faculties but little blunted.
She was gazing into the flames, with her hands upon her knees, quietly re-enacting
in her brain certain of the long chain of episodes, pathetic, tragical, and humorous,
which had constituted the parish history for the last sixty years.

On Swithin's entry she looked up at him in a sideway direction.
"You should not have waited for me, granny," he said.

"'Tis of no account, my child. I've had a nap while sitting here.
Yes, I've had a nap, and went straight back into my old county again as usual.
The place was as natural as when I left it — e'en just threescore years ago!
All the folks and my old aunt were there as when I was a child —
yet I suppose if I were really to set out and go there, hardly a soul would
be left alive to say to me, dog how art!
But tell Hannah to stir her stumps and serve supper — though I'd fain do it
myself, the poor old soul is getting so unhandy!"

Disused Apartments

She let him in through the casement, and they strolled forward softly,
Swithin with some curiosity, never before having gone beyond the library
and adjoining room.

The whole western side of the house was at this time shut up, her life
being confined to two or three small rooms in the south-east corner.

The great apartments through which they now whisperingly walked
wore already that funereal aspect that comes from disuse and inattention.

Triangular cobwebs already formed little hammocks for the dust in corners of
the wainscot, and a close smell of wood and leather, seasoned with
mouse-droppings, pervaded the atmosphere.

So seldom was the solitude of these chambers intruded on by human feet
that more than once a mouse stood and looked the twain in the face
from the arm of a sofa, or the top of a cabinet, without any great fear.

Confirmation, Old Style

“Confirmation was a sight different at that time,” mused Biles.

“The Bishops didn’t lay it on so strong then as they do now.

Now-a-days, yer bishop gies both hands to every Jack-rag and Tom-straw
that drops the knee afore him;

But ’twas six chaps to one blessing when we was boys.

The Bishop o’ that time would stretch out his palms and run his fingers over
our row of crowns as off-hand as a bank gentleman telling
money or a thimble-rigger at a fair.

The great lords of the church in them days
wasn’t particular to a soul or two more or less;
and for my part, I think living was easier for ’t.”

In A Country Church

From the north side of the nave smiled a host of girls,
Gaily uniform in dress, age and a temporary repression
Of their natural tendency to “skip like a hare over the meshes of good counsel.”

Their white muslin dresses, their round white caps, from beneath whose
 borders hair-knots and curls of various shades of brown escaped
 upon their low shoulders as if against their will,
Lighted up the dark pews and grey stone-work
To an unwonted warmth and life.

On the south side were the young men and boys —
Heavy, angular, and massive,
As indeed was rather necessary, considering what they would have to bear
 at the hands of wind and weather before they returned to that mouldy
 nave for the last time.

11.

FROM
THE ROMANTIC ADVENTURES OF A MILKMAID
(1883)

Sounds In A Fog

A dense white fog hung over the Valley of the Exe, ending against the hills
on either side.

But though nothing in the vale could be seen from higher ground,
Notes of differing kinds gave pretty clear indications that bustling life
was going on there.

This audible presence and visual absence of an active scene had a
peculiar effect above the fog level.

Nature had laid a white hand over the creatures ensconced within the vale,
as a hand might be laid over a nest of chirping birds.

The noises that ascended through the pallid coverlid were perturbed lowings,
mingled with human voices in sharps and flats, and the bark of a dog.
These, followed by the slamming of a gate, explained as well as eyesight
could have done, to any inhabitant of the district, that Dairyman Tucker's
under-milker was driving the cows from the meads into the stalls.

When a rougher accent joined in the vociferations of man and beast, it would
have been realised that the dairy-farmer himself had come out to
meet the cows, pail in hand, and white pinafore on;
and when, moreover, some women's voices joined in the chorus, that the cows
were stalled and proceedings about to commence.

A hush followed, the atmosphere being so stagnant that the milk could be heard
buzzing into the pails, together with occasional words of the milkmaids and men.

Young Countryman

He was a thoroughbred son of the country,
as far removed from what is known as the provincial,
as the latter is from the out-and-out gentleman of culture.

His trousers and waistcoat were of fustian, almost white,
but he wore a jacket of old-fashioned blue West-of-England cloth,
so well preserved that evidently the article was relegated to a box
whenever its owner engaged in such active occupations as he usually pursued.

His complexion was fair, almost florid, and he had scarcely any beard.
A novel attraction about this young man, which a glancing stranger would know nothing of,
was a rare and curious freshness of atmosphere that appertained to him,
to his clothes, to all his belongings, even to the room in which he had been sitting.

It might almost have been said that by adding him and his implements
to an over-crowded apartment you made it healthful.

This resulted from his trade.

He was a lime-burner; he handled lime daily; and in return the lime rendered him
an incarnation of salubrity.

His hair was dry, fair, and frizzled, the latter possibly by
the operation of the same caustic agent.

He carried as a walking-stick a green sapling, whose growth
had been contorted to a corkscrew pattern by a twining honeysuckle.

12.

FROM
THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE
(1886)

A Young Woman's Face

The sun shone in at the door upon the young woman's head and hair,
which was worn loose, so that the rays streamed into its depths as into a
hazel copse.

Her face, though somewhat wan and incomplete,
possessed the raw materials of beauty in a promising degree.

There was an under-handsomeness in it, struggling to reveal itself through
the provisional curves of immaturity, and the casual disfigurements that
resulted from the straitened circumstances of their lives.

She was handsome in the bone, hardly as yet handsome in the flesh.
She possibly might never be fully handsome, unless the carking accidents of
her daily existence could be evaded before
the mobile parts of her countenance had settled to their final mould.

Death-Watch Hours

To learn to take the universe seriously there is no quicker way than to watch —
to be a “waker,” as the country-people call it.

Between the hours at which the last toss-pot went by and the first sparrow
shook himself, the silence in Casterbridge —
barring the rare sound of the watchman —
was broken in Elizabeth’s ear only by the time-piece in the bedroom
ticking frantically against the clock on the stairs; ticking harder and
harder till it seemed to clang like a gong;

And all this while the subtle-souled girl asking herself why she was born,
why sitting in a room, and blinking at the candle;
why things around her had taken the shape they wore
in preference to every other possible shape.

Why they stared at her so helplessly, as if waiting for the touch
of some wand that should release them from terrestrial constraint;
what that chaos called consciousness, which spun in her at this moment
like a top, tended to, and began in.

Her eyes fell together; she was awake, yet she was asleep.

Casterbridge

When Elizabeth-Jane opened the hinged casement next morning,
The mellow air brought in the feel of imminent autumn almost as distinctly
as if she had been in the remotest hamlet.

Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite.

Bees and butterflies in the corn-fields at the top of the town, who
desired to get to the meads at the bottom, took no circuitous course,
but flew straight down High Street without any apparent consciousness
that they were traversing strange latitudes.

And in autumn airy spheres of thistledown floated into the same street,
lodged upon the shop fronts, blew into drains;
and innumerable tawny and yellow leaves skimmed along the pavement,
and stole through people's doorways into their passages with a hesitating
scratch on the floor, like the skirts of timid visitors.

Egdon Heath

Into this road they directed the horse's head, and soon were bowling across
That ancient country whose surface never had been stirred to a finger's depth,
Save by the scratchings of rabbits,
Since brushed by the feet of the earliest tribes.

The tumuli these had left behind,
Dun and shagged with heather,
Jutted roundly into the sky from the hill above,
As though they were the full breasts of Diana Multimammia supinely
extended there.

A Motion

The silent landlord came and leant over the settle
While the young man sang;

And even Mrs. Stannidge
Managed

To unstick herself from the framework of her chair in the bar,
And get as far

As the door-post, which movement she accomplished
By rolling herself round, as a cask is trundled on the chine

By a drayman
Without losing the perpendicular.

Ten O'Clock On Market Day

Horses for sale were tied in rows,
Their forelegs on the pavement,
Their hind legs in the street,
In which position
They occasionally nipped
Little boys by the shoulder
Who were passing to school.

And any inviting recess
In front of a house
That had been modestly kept back
From the general line
Was utilised by pig-dealers
As a pen
For their stock.

Casterbridge Was Like A Chess-board

It stood, with regard to the wide fertile land adjoining,
Clean-cut and distinct,
Like a chess-board on a green table-cloth.

The farmer's boy could sit under his barley-mow
And pitch a stone into the office-window
Of the town clerk;

Reapers at work among the sheaves
Nodded to acquaintances standing on the pavement corner;
The red-robed judge, when he condemned a sheep-stealer,

Pronounced sentence to the tune of Baa
That floated in at the window
From the remainder of the flock browsing hard by;

And at executions the waiting crowd stood
In a meadow immediately before the drop, out of which
The cows had been temporarily driven to give the spectators room.

Wants And Wishes

When she walked abroad she seemed to be occupied
With an inner chamber of ideas,
And to have slight need for visible objects.

She formed curious resolves
On checking gay fancies in the matter of clothes,
Because it was inconsistent with her past life

To blossom gaudily the moment she had become possessed
Of money. But nothing is more insidious
Than the evolution of wishes from mere fancies,

And of wants from mere wishes. Henchard gave Elizabeth-Jane
A box of delicately-tinted gloves one spring day.
She wanted to wear them to show her appreciation of his kindness,

But she had no bonnet
That would harmonize. As an artistic indulgence she thought
She would have such a bonnet.

When she had a bonnet that would go with the gloves
She had no dress that would go with the bonnet.
It was now absolutely necessary to finish;

She ordered the requisite article,
And found that she had no sunshade to go with the dress.
In for a penny in for a pound; she bought

The sunshade,
And the whole structure
Was at last complete.

Last Wishes

“Yes,” says she, “when I’m gone, and my last breath’s blowed,
Look in the top drawer o’ the chest in the back room
By the window, and you’ll find all my coffin clothes;

A piece of flannel -- that’s to put under me, and the little piece
Is to put under my head;
And my new stockings for my feet —

They are folded alongside, and all my other things.
And then there’s four ounce pennies, the heaviest I could find,
A-tied up in bits of linen, for weights —

Two for my right eye and two for my left,” she said.
“And when you’ve used ’em, and my eyes don’t open no more,
Bury the pennies, good souls,

And don’t ye go spending ’em, for I shouldn’t like it.
And open the windows as soon as I am carried out,
And make it as cheerful as you can for Elizabeth-Jane.”

How Her Request Was Treated

“Well, and Martha did it, and buried the ounce pennies in the garden.
But if ye’ll believe words, that man, Christopher Coney,
Went and dug ’em up, and spent ’em at the Three Mariners.
‘Faith,’ he said, ‘why should death rob life o’ fourpence?
Death’s not of such good report that we should respect ’en
To that extent,’ says he.”

“’Twas a cannibal deed!” deprecated her listeners.

“Gad, then, I won’t quite hae it,” said Solomon Longways.
“I say it to-day, and ’tis a Sunday morning, and I wouldn’t speak wrongfully
For a zilver zixpence at such a time. I don’t see noo harm in it.

To respect the dead is sound doxology and I wouldn’t sell skellintons —
Leastwise respectable skellintons — to be varnished for ’natomies,
Except I were out o’ work. But money is scarce,

And throats get dry. Why *should* death rob life o’ fourpence?
I say there was no treason in it.”

“Well, poor soul; she’s helpless
To hinder that or anything now,” answered Mother Cuxsom.

“And all her shining keys will be took from her, and her cupboards opened;
And little things a’ didn’t wish seen, anybody will see;
And her wishes and ways will all be as nothing!”

13.

FROM
THE WOODLANDERS
(1887)

On The Forsaken Coach-Road

Here the trees, timber or fruit-bearing as the case may be,
Make the wayside hedges ragged by their drip and shade,
Their lower limbs stretching in level repose over the road,
As though reclining on the insubstantial air.

At one place, on the skirts of Blackmoor Vale,
Where the bold brow of High-Stoy Hill is seen two or three miles ahead,
The leaves lie so thick in autumn as to completely bury the track.

The spot is lonely, and when the days are darkening
The many gay charioteers now perished who have rolled along the way,
The blistered soles that have trodden it,
And the tears that have wetted it, return upon the mind of the loiterer.

Returning To The Modest Home Of Her Youth

When dinner was over Grace took a candle and began to ramble pleasurably
Through the rooms of her old home,
From which she had latterly become well-nigh an alien.

Each nook and each object revived a memory,
And simultaneously modified it.

The chambers seemed lower than they had appeared on any previous occasion of
her return,

The surfaces of both walls and ceilings
Standing in such near relations to the eye that it could not avoid taking
microscopic note of their irregularities and old fashion.

Her own bedroom wore at once a look more familiar than when she had left it,
and yet a face estranged.

The world of little things therein gazed at her in helpless stationariness,
As though they had tried and been unable to make any progress without her
presence.

Over the place where her candle had been accustomed to stand,
When she had used to read in bed till the midnight hour,
There was still the brown spot of smoke.

She did not know that her father had taken especial care to keep it from being
cleaned off.

Planting The Sighing Pines

The holes were already dug, and they set to work.
Winterborne's fingers were endowed with a gentle conjurer's touch in
 spreading the roots of each little tree,
Resulting in a sort of caress under which the delicate fibres all laid
 themselves out in their proper directions for growth.
He put most of these roots towards the south-west;
For, he said, in forty years' time, when some great gale is blowing from
 that quarter, the trees will require the strongest holdfast on that side
 to stand against it and not fall.

"How they sigh directly we put 'em upright,
Though while they are lying down they don't sigh at all," said Marty.

"Do they?" said Giles. "I've never noticed it."

She erected one of the young pines into its hole, and held up her finger;
The soft musical breathing instantly set in
Which was not to cease night or day till the grown tree should be felled —
Probably long after the two planters had been felled themselves.

"It seems to me," the girl continued, "as if they sigh
Because they are very sorry to begin life in earnest — just as we be."

"Just as we be?" He looked critically at her.
"You ought not to feel like that, Marty."

Her only reply was turning to take up the next tree;
And they planted on through a great part of the day,
Almost without another word.

Light Snowfall

It was snowing
With a fine-flaked desultoriness
Just sufficient to make the woodland grey
Without ever achieving
Whiteness.

A Sudden Spring

Spring weather came on rather suddenly, the unsealing of buds that had long been
swollen
Accomplishing itself in the space of one warm night.

The rush of sap in the veins of the trees
Could almost be heard.

The flowers of late April took up a position unseen, and looked as if they had
been blooming a long while,
Though there had been no trace of them the day before yesterday;
Birds began not to mind getting wet.

In-door people said they had heard the nightingale,
To which out-door people replied contemptuously
That they had heard him a fortnight before.

Midsummer Leaves

The leaves over Hintock unrolled their creased tissues,
And the woodland seemed to change from an open filigree
To a solid opaque body of infinitely larger shape and importance.

The boughs cast green shades, which disagreed with the complexion of the girls
who walked there;
And a fringe of the same boughs which overhung Mr. Melbury's garden
Dripped on his seed-plots when it rained,
Pitting their surface all over with pock-marks, till Melbury declared that gardens
in such a place were no good at all.

The two trees that had creaked all the winter left off creaking,
The whirr of the night-hawk, however, forming
A very satisfactory continuation of uncanny music from that quarter.

Except at midday the sun was not seen complete by the Hintock people,
But rather in the form of numerous little stars staring through the leaves.

Making Up The Differences In Marriage

“But this deceiving of folks is nothing unusual in matrimony,” said Farmer Bawtree.

“I knowed a man and wife — faith, I don’t mind owning, as there’s no strangers
here, that the pair were my own relations —

They’d be at it that hot one hour

That you’d hear the poker, and the tongs, and the bellows, and the warming-pan,
Flee across the house with the movements of their vengeance;

And the next hour you’d hear ’em singing ‘The Spotted Cow’ together,
As peaceable as the two holy twins; yes — and very good voices they had,
And would strike in like street ballet-singers to one another’s support
in the high notes.”

“’Tis so with couples: they do make up differences in all manner of queer
ways,” said the bark-ripper.

“I knowed a woman; and the husband o’ her went away for four-and-twenty year.
And one night he came home when she was sitting by the fire,
And thereupon he sat down himself on the other side of the chimney-corner.

‘Well,’ says she, ‘have ye got any news?’

‘Don’t know as I have,’ says he; ‘have you?’

‘No,’ says she, ‘except that my daughter by the husband that succeeded ’ee was
married last month,

Which was a year after I was made a widow by him.’

‘Oh! Anything else?’ he says. ‘No,’ says she.

And there they sat, one on each side of that chimney-corner,
And were found by the neighbours
Sound asleep in their chairs,
Not having known what to talk about at all.”

14.

FROM
TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES
(1891)

Inexperienced Young Woman

Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life
Was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience.

The dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school:
the characteristic intonation of that dialect for this district being the
voicing approximately rendered by the syllable UR, probably as rich
an utterance as any to be found in human speech.

The pouted-up deep red mouth to which this syllable was native
Had hardly as yet settled into its definite shape,
And her lower lip had a way of thrusting the middle of her top one upward,
when they closed together after a word.

Phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still.

As she walked along to-day, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness,
You could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks
Or her ninth sparkling from her eyes;
And even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then.

Rocking The Baby While Washing Clothes

As usual, Mrs. Durbeyfield was balanced on one foot beside the tub,
The other being engaged in the aforesaid business of rocking her youngest child.

The cradle-rockers had done hard duty for so many years,
Under the weight of so many children, on that flagstone floor, that they
 were worn nearly flat, in consequence of which a huge jerk
 accompanied each swing of the cot,
 flinging the baby from side to side like a weaver's shuttle,
as Mrs. Durbeyfield, excited by her song, trod the rocker with all the
spring that was left in her after a long day's seething in the suds.

Nick-knock, nick-knock, went the cradle;
The candle-flame stretched itself tall and began jiggling up and down;

The water dribbled from the matron's elbows,
And the song galloped on to the end of the verse.

A Happy Hour Or Two

This going to hunt up her shiftless husband at the inn
Was one of Mrs. Durbeyfield's still-extant enjoyments
In the muck and muddle of rearing children.

To discover him at Rolliver's,
To sit there for an hour or two by his side and dismiss all thought and care
of the children during the interval, made her happy.

A sort of halo, an occidental glow, came over life then.

Troubles and other realities took on themselves
A metaphysical impalpability,
Sinking to mere mental phenomena for serene contemplation,
And no longer stood as pressing concretions which chafed body and soul.

The youngsters, not immediately within sight,
Seemed rather bright and desirable appurtenances than otherwise;
The incidents of daily life were not without humorousness and jollity in
their aspect there.

She felt a little as she had used to feel when she sat by her now-wedded
husband in the same spot during his wooing,
Shutting her eyes to his defects of character and regarding him only in his
ideal presentation as lover.

Before Dawn

On the morning appointed for her departure
Tess was awake before dawn —

At the marginal minute of the dark
When the grove is still mute,
Save for one prophetic bird
Who sings with a clear-voiced conviction
That he at least knows the correct time of day,

The rest preserving silence
As if equally convinced that he is mistaken.

Evening

It was a fine September evening, just before sunset,
When yellow lights struggle with blue shades in hair-like lines
And the atmosphere itself forms a prospect
Without aid from more solid objects, except
The innumerable winged insects that dance in it.

Through this low-lit mistiness Tess walked leisurely along.

After The Dance

Then these children of the open air, whom even excess of alcohol
Could scarce injure permanently, betook themselves to the field-path;

And as they went there moved onward with them,
Around the shadow of each one's head,
A circle of opalised light, formed by the moon's rays upon the glistening
sheet of dew.

Each pedestrian could see no halo but his or her own,
Which never deserted the head-shadow, whatever its vulgar unsteadiness
might be;
But adhered to it, and persistently beautified it;
Till the erratic motions seemed an inherent part of the irradiation,
And the fumes of their breathing a component of the night's mist;
And the spirit of the scene, and of the moonlight, and of Nature, seemed
harmoniously to mingle with the spirit of wine.

Hazy Sunrise

It was a hazy sunrise in August.
The denser nocturnal vapours,
Attacked by the warm beams,

Were dividing and shrinking into isolated fleeces
Within hollows and coverts, where they waited
Till they should be dried away to nothing.

The sun, on account of the mist,
Had a curious sentient, personal look,
Demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression.

His present aspect, coupled with the lack of all human forms in the scene,
Explained the old-time heliolatries in a moment.
One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky.

The luminary was a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, God-like creature,
Gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth
Upon the earth that was brimming with interest for him.

His light, a little later, broke through chinks of cottage shutters,
Throwing stripes like red-hot poker upon cupboards, chests of drawers,
 and other furniture within;
And awakening harvesters who were not already astir.

Illegitimate Infant's Burial

So the baby was carried in a small deal box,
Under an ancient woman's shawl,
To the churchyard that night,
And buried by lantern-light,

At the cost of a shilling and a pint of beer to the sexton,
In that shabby corner of God's allotment
Where He lets the nettles grow,
And where all unbaptised infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others
of the conjecturally damned are laid.

In spite of the untoward surroundings, however,
Tess bravely made a little cross of two laths and a piece of string,
And having bound it with flowers,
She stuck it up at the head of the grave one evening when she could enter
the churchyard without being seen,

Putting at the foot also a bunch of the same flowers
In a little jar of water to keep them alive.
What matter was it that on the outside of the jar
The eye of mere observation noted the words "Keelwell's Marmalade"?

The eye of maternal affection did not see them in its vision of higher things.

William Dewy And The Bull

“Once there was an old aged man over at Mellstock — William Dewy by name — one of the family that used to do a good deal of business as transters over there — Jonathan, do ye mind? —
I knowed the man by sight as well as I know my own brother, in a manner of speaking.

Well, this man was a’ coming home-along from a wedding
Where he had been playing his fiddle, one fine moonlit night,
And for shortness’ sake he took a cut across Forty-acres,
A field lying that way, where a bull was out to grass.

The bull seed William and took after him, horns aground, begad;
And though William runned his best,
And hadn’t *much* drink in him
(Considering ’twas a wedding, and the folks well off),

He found he’d never reach the fence and get over in time to save himself.
Well, as a last thought, he pulled out his fiddle as he runned,
And struck up a jig, turning to the bull, and backing towards the corner.
The bull softened down, and stood still, looking hard at William Dewy,

Who fiddled on and on; till a sort of smile stole over the bull’s face.
But no sooner did William stop his playing and turn to get over hedge
Than the bull would stop his smiling and lower his horns
Towards the seat of William’s breeches.

Well, William had to turn about and play on, willy-nilly;
And ’twas only three o’clock in the world,
And ’a knowed that nobody would come that way for hours,
And he so leery and tired that ’a didn’t know what to do.

When he had scraped till about four o’clock
He felt that he verily would have to give over soon,
And he said to himself, ‘There’s only this last tune between me and eternal welfare!

Heaven save me, or I'm a done man.'

Well, then he called to mind how he'd seen the cattle kneel o' Christmas Eves
in the dead o' night.

It was not Christmas Eve then, but it came into his head to play a trick
upon the bull.

So he broke into the 'Tivity Hymn, just as at Christmas carol-singing;

When, lo and behold, down went the bull on his bended knees,
In his ignorance, just as if 'twere the true 'Tivity night and hour.
As soon as his horned friend were down, William turned,
Clinked off like a long-dog, and jumped safe over hedge, before the praying
bull had got on his feet again to take after him.

William used to say that he'd seen a man look a fool a good many times,
But never such a fool
As that bull looked when he found his pious feelings had been played upon,
And 'twas not Christmas Eve

Yes, William Dewy, that was the man's name;
And I can tell you to a foot
Where he's a-lying in Mellstock Churchyard at this very moment —
Just between the second yew-tree and the north aisle."

A Milking

Suddenly there arose from all parts of the lowland a prolonged and repeated call: “Waow! Waow! Waow!”

From the furthest east to the furthest west the cries spread as if by contagion, accompanied in some cases by the barking of a dog.

It was not the expression of the valley’s consciousness that beautiful Tess had arrived, but the ordinary announcement of milking-time — half-past four o’clock, when the dairymen set about getting in the cows.

The red and white herd nearest at hand, which had been phlegmatically waiting for the call, now trooped towards the steading in the background, their great bags of milk swinging under them as they walked.

Tess followed slowly in their rear, and entered the barton by the open gate through which they had entered before her.

Long thatched sheds stretched round the enclosure, their slopes encrusted with vivid green moss, and their eaves supported by wooden posts rubbed to a glossy smoothness by the flanks of infinite cows and calves of bygone years, now passed to an oblivion almost inconceivable in its profundity.

Between the posts were ranged the milchers, each exhibiting herself at the present moment to a whimsical eye in the rear as a circle on two stalks, down the centre of which a switch moved pendulum-wise; while the sun, lowering itself behind this patient row, threw their shadows accurately inwards upon the wall.

Thus it threw shadows of these obscure and homely figures every evening with as much care over each contour as if it had been the profile of a court beauty on a palace wall;

Copied them as diligently as it had copied Olympian shapes on marble façades long ago,

Or the outline of Alexander, Caesar, and the pharaohs.

Much To His Surprise He Takes A Delight In Companionship

The typical and unvarying Hodge ceased to exist.

He had been disintegrated into a number of varied fellow-creatures —

Beings of many minds, beings infinite in difference;

Some happy: many serene, a few depressed,

One here and there bright even to genius,

Some stupid, others wanton, others austere;

Some mutely Miltonic, some potentially Cromwellian —

Into men who had private views of each other, as he had of his friends;

Who could applaud or condemn each other, amuse or sadden themselves by
the contemplation of each other's foibles or vices;

Men every one of whom walked in his own individual way the road to
dusty death.

That Souls Can Leave A Living Body

“I don’t know about ghosts,” she was saying;

“But I do know that our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when
we are alive.”

The dairyman turned to her with his mouth full,
His eyes charged with serious inquiry,
And his great knife and fork (breakfasts were breakfasts here)
Planted erect on the table, like the beginning of a gallows.

“What — really now? And is it so, maidy?” he said.

“A very easy way to feel ’em go,” continued Tess,
“Is to lie on the grass at night
And look up straight at some big bright star; and by fixing your mind upon it,
You will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds o’ miles away from
your body, which you don’t seem to want at all.”

The dairyman removed his hard gaze from Tess, and fixed it on his wife.
Now that’s a rum thing, Christianer — hey?
To think o’ the miles I’ve vamped o’ starlight nights these last thirty year,
courting, or trading, or for doctor, or for nurse,
And yet never had the least notion o’ that till now, or feeled my soul rise
so much as an inch above my shirt-collar.”

The general attention being drawn to her, including that of
the dairyman’s pupil,
Tess flushed, and remarking evasively that it was only a fancy, resumed
her breakfast.

Germes And Particles

The season developed and matured.

Another year's instalment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes,
finches, and such ephemeral creatures, took up their positions
Where only a year ago others had stood in their place
When these were nothing more than germes and inorganic particles.

Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds
And stretched them into long stalks,
Lifted up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals,
And sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings.

Like A Fascinated Bird

The outskirt of the garden in which Tess found herself
Had been left uncultivated for some years,
And was now damp and rank with juicy grass
Which sent up mists of pollen at a touch;
And with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells — weeds whose
red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling
as that of cultivated flowers.
She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth,
Gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot,
Staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime,
And rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white
on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin;
Thus she drew quite near to Clare, still unobserved of him.

Tess was conscious of neither time nor space.
The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by
gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers;
She undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their
harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into
her eyes.

The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible,
And the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's sensibility.
Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they
would not close for intentness, and the waves of colour
mixed with the waves of sound.

The light which still shone was derived mainly from a large hole in the
western bank of cloud;
It was like a piece of day left behind by accident, dusk having closed in
elsewhere.

He concluded his plaintive melody, a very simple performance, demanding
no great skill; and she waited, thinking another might be begun.

But, tired of playing, he had desultorily come round the fence, and was
rambling up behind her.

Tess, her cheeks on fire, moved away furtively, as if hardly moving at all.

Angel, however, saw her light summer gown, and he spoke; his low tones
reaching her, though he was some distance off.

“What makes you draw off in that way, Tess?” said he. “Are you afraid?”

“Oh no, sir . . . not of outdoor things;

Especially just now when the apple-blooth is falling, and everything so
green.”

Summer At The Dairy

The rains having passed the uplands were dry.

The wheels of the dairyman's spring cart, as he sped home from market,
Licked up the pulverised surface of the highway, and were followed by
white ribands of dust, as if they had set a thin powder-train on fire.

The cows jumped wildly over the five-barred barton-gate, maddened
by the gad-fly;

Dairyman Crick kept his shirt-sleeves permanently rolled up from Monday
to Saturday:

Open windows had no effect in ventilation without open doors,
And in the dairy-garden the blackbirds and thrushes crept about under
the currant-bushes, rather in the manner of quadrupeds than
of winged creatures.

The flies in the kitchen were lazy, teasing, and familiar, crawling about
in unwonted places, on the floor, into drawers, and over the backs
of the milkmaids' hands.

Conversations were concerning sunstroke;

While butter-making, and still more butter-keeping, was a despair.

Young Man And Woman In An Early Fog

Hérons came, with a great bold noise as of opening doors and shutters, out of the boughs of a plantation which they frequented at the side of the mead;

Or, if already on the spot, hardily maintained their standing in the water as the pair walked by,

Watching them by moving their heads round in a slow, horizontal, passionless wheel, like the turn of puppets by clockwork.

They could then see the faint summer fogs in layers, woolly, level, and apparently no thicker than counterpanes, spread about the meadows in detached remnants of small extent.

On the grey moisture of the grass were marks where the cows had lain through the night — dark-green islands of dry herbage the size of their carcasses, in the general sea of dew.

From each island proceeded a serpentine trail, by which the cow had rambled away to feed after getting up,

At the end of which trail they found her; the snoring puff from her nostrils, when she recognised them, making an intenser little fog of her own amid the prevailing one.

Then they drove the animals back to the barton, or sat down to milk them on the spot, as the case might require.

Or perhaps the summer fog was more general,

And the meadows lay like a white sea, out of which the scattered trees rose like dangerous rocks.

Birds would soar through it into the upper radiance, and hang on the wing sunning themselves, or alight on the wet rails subdividing the mead, which now shone like glass rods.

Minute diamonds of moisture from the mist hung, too, upon Tess's eyelashes, and drops upon her hair, like seed pearls.

When the day grew quite strong and commonplace

These dried off her; moreover, Tess then lost her strange and ethereal beauty;

Her teeth, lips, and eyes scintillated in the sunbeams,

And she was again the dazzlingly fair dairymaid only, who had to hold her own against the other women of the world.

Two Milkers

All the men, and some of the women, when milking,
Dug their foreheads into the cows and gazed into the pail.
But a few — mainly the younger ones — rested their heads sideways.

This was Tess Durbeyfield's habit, her temple pressing the milcher's flank,
Her eyes fixed on the far end of the meadow
With the quiet of one lost in meditation.

She was milking Old Pretty thus, and the sun chancing to be on the milking-side,
it shone flat upon her pink-gowned form and her white curtain-bonnet, and
upon her profile, rendering it keen as a cameo cut from
the dun background of the cow.

She did not know that Clare had followed her round,
And that he sat under his cow watching her.

The stillness of her head and features was remarkable:
She might have been in a trance, her eyes open, yet unseeing.

Nothing in the picture moved but Old Pretty's tail and Tess's pink hands,
the latter so gently as to be a rhythmic pulsation only, as if they were
obeying a reflex stimulus, like a beating heart.

Her Lover Studies Her Mouth

How very lovable her face was to him.
Yet there was nothing ethereal about it;
All was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation.

And it was in her mouth that this culminated.

Eyes almost as deep and speaking he had seen before,
And cheeks perhaps as fair;
Brows as arched, a chin and throat almost as shapely;

Her mouth he had seen nothing to equal on the face of the earth.

To a young man with the least fire in him
That little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip
Was distracting, infatuating, maddening.

He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his
mind with such persistent iteration the old Elizabethan simile of
roses filled with snow.

Perfect, he, as a lover, might have called them off-hand.
But no — they were not perfect. And it was the touch of the imperfect
upon the would-be perfect
That gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity.

Clare had studied the curves of those lips so many times
That he could reproduce them mentally with ease;
And now, as they again confronted him, clothed with colour and life,
They sent an *aura* over his flesh, a breeze through his nerves,
Which wellnigh produced a qualm; and actually produced,
By some mysterious physiological process, a prosaic sneeze.

Embrace

Tess's excitable heart beat against his by way of reply;

And there they stood upon the red-brick floor of the entry,

The sun slanting in by the window upon his back

As he held her tightly to his breast;

Upon her inclining face, upon the blue veins of her temple,

Upon her naked arm, and her neck,

And into the depths of her hair.

Having been lying down in her clothes she was warm as a sunned cat.

At first she would not look straight up at him, but her eyes soon lifted,

And his plumbed the deepness of the ever-varying pupils, with their

radiating fibrils of blue, and black, and grey, and violet,

While she regarded him as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam.

Gardening At Night In March

Westward, the wiry boughs of the bare thorn hedge which formed the
boundary of the field, rose against the pale opalescence of the lower sky.

Above, Jupiter hung like a full-blown jonquil, so bright
as almost to throw a shade.

A few small nondescript stars were appearing elsewhere.

In the distance a dog barked, and wheels occasionally rattled along the dry road.

Still the prongs continued to click assiduously, for it was not late;
And though the air was fresh and keen
There was a whisper of spring in it that cheered the workers on.
Something in the place, the hour, the crackling fires, the fantastic mysteries
of light and shade,
Made others as well as Tess enjoy being there.

Nightfall, which in the frost of winter comes as a fiend and in the warmth
of summer as a lover,
Came as a tranquillizer on this March day.

15.

FROM
JUDE THE OBSCURE
(1896)

Marygreen

It was as old-fashioned as it was small, and it rested in the lap of an undulating upland adjoining the North Wessex downs.

Old as it was, however, the well-shaft was probably the only relic of the local history that remained absolutely unchanged.

Many of the thatched and dormered dwelling-houses had been pulled down of late years, and many trees felled on the green.

Above all, the original church, hump-backed, wood-turreted, and quaintly hipped, Had been taken down, and either cracked up into heaps of road-metal in the lane, Or utilised as pig-sty walls, garden seats, guard-stones to fences, and rockeries in the flower-beds of the neighbourhood.

In place of it a tall new building of modern Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes, had been erected on a new piece of ground by a certain obliterator of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day.

The site whereon so long had stood the ancient temple to the Christian divinities

Was not even recorded on the green and level grass-plot that had immemorially been the churchyard,

The obliterated graves being commemorated by eighteen-penny cast-iron crosses warranted to last five years.

Useless Boy

“And who’s he?” asked one, comparatively a stranger, when the boy entered.

“Well ye med ask it, Mrs. Williams.

He’s my great-nephew — come since you was last this way.”

The old inhabitant who answered was a tall, gaunt woman, who spoke
tragically on the most trivial subject,
And gave a phrase of her conversation to each auditor in turn.

“He come from Mellstock, down in South Wessex, about a year ago —
worse luck for ’n, Belinda” (turning to the right) “where his father
was living, and was took wi’ the shakings for death, and died
in two days, as you know, Caroline” (turning to the left).

“It would ha’ been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too, wi’ thy
mother and father, poor useless boy!

But I’ve got him here to stay with me till I can see what’s to be done with
un, though I am obliged to let him earn any penny he can.
Just now he’s a-scaring of birds for Farmer Troutham.
It keeps him out of mischty.

Why do ye turn away, Jude?” she continued,
As the boy, feeling the impact of their glances
Like slaps upon his face, moved aside.

For Them, A Lonely Place

“How ugly it is here!” he murmured.

The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece
of new corduroy, lending a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse,
Taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of
the few recent months,
Though to every clod and stone there really attached associations enough
and to spare —
Echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days, of spoken words, and of sturdy deeds.
Every inch of ground had been the site, first and last, of energy, gaiety,
horse-play, bickerings, weariness.

Groups of gleaners had squatted in the sun on every square yard.
Love-matches that had populated the adjoining hamlet had been made up
there between reaping and carrying.
Under the hedge which divided the field from a distant plantation
girls had given themselves to lovers who would not turn their heads
to look at them by the next harvest;
And in that ancient cornfield many a man had made love-promises
to a woman at whose voice he had trembled by the next seed-time
after fulfilling them in the church adjoining.

But this neither Jude nor the rooks around him considered.
For them it was a lonely place,
Possessing, in the one view, only the quality of a work-ground,
And in the other that of a granary good to feed in.

Temporary Despondency

Jude went out, and, feeling more than ever his existence
To be an undemanded one, he lay down upon his back
On a heap of litter near the pig-sty. The fog
Had by this time become more translucent,

And the position of the sun could be seen through it.
He pulled his straw hat over his face,
And peered through the interstices of the plaiting
At the white brightness, vaguely reflecting.

Growing up brought responsibilities, he found.
Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought.
Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for.
That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another

Sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older,
And felt yourself to be at the centre of your time,
And not at a point in its circumference,
As you had felt when you were little,

You were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived.
All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling,
And the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life,
And shook it, and warped it.

If he could only prevent himself growing up!
He did not want to be a man.
Then, like the natural boy, he forgot his despondency, and sprang up.
During the remainder of the morning he helped his aunt, and in the
afternoon, when there was nothing more to be done, he went into
the village. Here he asked a man whereabouts Christminster lay.

Christminster Ways

Here a little book of tales which Jude had tucked up under his arm,
Having brought them to read on his way hither before it grew dark,
Slipped and fell into the road.
The carter eyed him while he picked it up and straightened the leaves.

“Ah, young man,” he observed, “you’d have to get
Your head screwed on t’other way
Before you could read what they read there.”
“‘Why?’” asked the boy.

“O, they never look at anything that folks like we can understand,”
The carter continued, by way of passing the time.
“On’y foreign tongues used in the days of the Tower of Babel, when no
two families spoke alike.
They read that sort of thing as fast as a night-hawk will whirl.

’Tis all learning there — nothing but learning, except religion.
And that’s learning too, for I never could understand it.
Yes, ’tis a serious-minded place.
Not but there’s wenches in the streets o’ nights

You know, I suppose, that they raise pa’sons there
Like radishes in a bed? And though it do take — how many years, Bob? —
Five years to turn a lirruring hobble-de-hoy chap
Into a solemn preaching man with no corrupt passions,

They’ll do it, if it can be done,
And polish un off like the workmen they be
And turn un out wi’ a long face, and a long black coat and waistcoat, and a
religious collar and hat, same as they used to wear in the Scriptures,
so that his own mother wouldn’t know un sometimes
There, ’tis their business, like anybody else’s.”

A Pessimistic Thought

Somebody might have come along that way
Who would have asked him his trouble,
And might have cheered him by saying that his notions were further advanced
than those of his grammarian.

But nobody did come, because nobody does;
And under the crushing recognition of his gigantic error
Jude continued to wish himself out of the world.

Female Animal

She whom he addressed was a fine dark-eyed girl,
Not exactly handsome,
But capable of passing as such at a little distance,
Despite some coarseness of skin and fibre.

She had a round and prominent bosom,
Full lips,
Perfect teeth,
And the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg.

She was a complete and substantial female animal — no more, no less;
And Jude was almost certain that to her was attributable the enterprise
Of attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters
To what was simmering in the minds around him.

Compelled

In short, as if materially,
A compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power
Seized hold of him —
Something which had nothing in common
With the spirits and influences
That had moved him hitherto.

This seemed to care little for his reason and his will,
Nothing for his so-called elevated intentions,
And moved him along,
As a violent schoolmaster
A schoolboy he has seized by the collar,
In a direction which tended towards the embrace of a woman
for whom he had no respect, and whose life had nothing in common
with his own except locality.

Another Young Woman

“She was not exactly a tomboy, you know;
But she could do things that only boys do, as a rule.

I’ve seen her hit in and steer down the long slide on yonder pond,
With her little curls blowing,

One of a file of twenty moving along the sky like shapes painted on glass,
And up the back slide without stopping.

All boys except herself; and then they’d cheer her,
And then she’d say, ‘Don’t be saucy, boys,’

And suddenly run indoors. They’d try to coax her out again.
But a’ wouldn’t come.”

The Journeying Boy

In the down train that was timed to reach Aldbrickham station about ten
o'clock the next evening,
A small, pale child's face could be seen in the gloom of a third-class carriage.
He had large, frightened eyes, and wore a white woolen cravat,
Over which a key was suspended round his neck by a piece of common string:
the key attracting attention by its occasional shine in the lamplight.
In the band of his hat his half-ticket was stuck.
His eyes remained mostly fixed on the back of the seat opposite, and never turned
to the window even when a station was reached and called.

On the other seat were two or three passengers, one of them a working woman
who held a basket on her lap, in which was a tabby kitten.
The woman opened the cover now and then,
whereupon the kitten would put out its head, and indulge in playful antics.
At these the fellow-passengers laughed, except the solitary boy bearing the key
and ticket, who, regarding the kitten with his saucer eyes,
Seemed mutely to say: "All laughing comes from misapprehension.
Rightly looked at there is no laughable thing under the sun."

Occasionally at a stoppage the guard would look into the compartment
And say to the boy, "All right, my man. Your box is safe in the van."
The boy would say, "Yes," without animation, would try to smile, and fail.

He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly
that his real self showed through crevices.
A ground swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then
to lift the child in this his morning-life,
When his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of Time,
And appeared not to care about what it saw.

When the other travellers closed their eyes, which they did one by one --
Even the kitten curling itself up in the basket, weary of its too circumscribed play --
The boy remained just as before. He then seemed to be doubly awake,
Like an enslaved and dwarfed Divinity, sitting passive and regarding his companions
As if he saw their whole rounded lives rather than their immediate figures.

16.

FROM
THE WELL-BELOVED
(1897)

London Scene: Her Absence

Pierston went to the window. It was half-past nine o'clock,
And owing to her absence the blinds were not down.

He opened the casement and stepped out upon the balcony.
The green shade of his lamp screened its rays from the gloom without.

Over the opposite square the moon hung, and to the right there stretched
a long street, filled with a diminishing array of lamps, some single,
some in clusters, among them an occasional blue or red one.
From a corner came the notes of a piano-organ strumming out a stirring march
of Rossini's.
The shadowy black figures of pedestrians moved up, down, and across the
embrowned roadway.

Above the roofs was a bank of livid mist,
And higher a greenish-blue sky, in which stars were visible,
Though its lower part was still pale with daylight, against which rose
Chimney-pots in the form of elbows, prongs, and fists.

From the whole scene proceeded a ground rumble, miles in extent,
Upon which individual rattles, voices, a tin whistle, the bark of a dog, rode
like bubbles on a sea.
The whole noise impressed him with the sense that no one in its enormous
mass ever required rest.

In this illimitable ocean of humanity there was a unit of existence,
His Avic,
Wandering alone.

Further Details

He again went out upon the balcony;
The dignified street in which he lived was almost vacant,
And the lamps stood like placed sentinels awaiting some procession which
tarried long.

At a point under him where the road was torn up there stood a red light,
And at the corner two men were talking in leisurely repose,
As if sunning themselves at noonday.

Lovers of a feline disposition,
Who were never seen by daylight,
Joked and darted at each other in and out of area gates.

His attention was fixed on the cabs,
And he held his breath as the hollow clap of each horse's hoofs drew near the front
of the house,
Only to go onward into the square.

The two lamps of each vehicle afar dilated with its near approach, and seemed
to swerve towards him.
It was Avise surely?
No, it passed by.

Almost frantic he again descended and let himself out of the house, moving
towards a more central part, where the roar still continued.

Before emerging into the noisy thoroughfare he observed a small figure
approaching leisurely along the opposite side,
And hastened across
to find it was she.

What The Young Lady From The Country Went Out For

“Well, you must not do it again.

I’ll tell you someday why.

What’s that you have in your hand?”

“A mouse-trap. There are lots of mice in this kitchen —

Sooty mice, not clean like ours —

And I thought I’d try to catch them.

That was what I went so far to buy,

As there were no shops open just about here.

I’ll set it now.”

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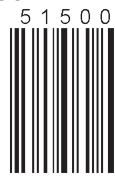
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